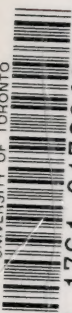


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# THE MACEDONIAN CAMPAIGN

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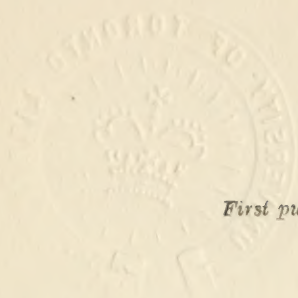
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## PREFATORY NOTE

THE operations of the Allied forces, and in particular those of the Italian contingent in Macedonia, are less well known than those of almost any other of the many campaigns into which the World War is subdivided. There have already been several published accounts of it in English and French, but these works have dealt almost exclusively with the action of the British or French contingent, and are mostly of a polemical or journalistic character; very little has been written about the other Allied forces, or about the campaign as a whole. Owing to the position which I held for two years as Italian liaison officer with the various Allied Commands in the East, I have been able to collect a good deal of unpublished material on the subject, and I felt that it might be useful to give a consecutive account of these events, correcting many inaccuracies which have been spread about. The book was written originally in Italian, and dealt in particular detail with the operations of the Italian expeditionary force. In the present English edition I have omitted certain details concerning the Italian force, which were of less interest for a non-Italian public, while I have added some further material of a general character, which I only obtained since the Italian edition was written.

The published authoritative and reliable sources for the history of the Macedonian campaign are very few. A bibliography is appended. Besides my own notes

and recollections of the events, set down day by day, and the records of various conversations which I had with the chief actors in the Balkan war drama, I must acknowledge the valuable assistance afforded to me by various Italian and foreign officers and officials. My especial thanks are due to the following :

General Petitti di Roreto, for information on the events of the early period of the campaign ;

General Ernesto Mombelli, who supplied me with a great deal of useful information and advice on the latter period ;

Colonel Vitale, under whom I worked for some time, and who first instructed me in the duties of a liaison officer ;

Colonel Fenoglietto, who kindly provided a part of the photographs reproduced in the book ;

Commendatore Fracassetti, director of the Museo del Risorgimento in Rome, who kindly placed a large number of photographs at my disposal, authorizing me to make use of them ;

Captain Harold Goad, British liaison officer with the Italian force from soon after its landing at Salonica until it was broken up in the summer of 1919, who supplied me with many details concerning the topography of the Italian area of the Macedonian front, which he knew stone by stone, and his notes and recollections of many political and military episodes. Few men have done such admirable and disinterested work in favour of good relations between Britain and Italy, both during and after the war, as this officer, who was most deservedly decorated with the Italian silver medal for valour in the field.

L. V.



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GENERAL ERNESTO MOMBELLI, COMMANDER OF THE ITALIAN EXPEDITIONARY  
FORCE IN MACEDONIA.



# The Macedonian Campaign

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

REASONS FOR THE MACEDONIAN CAMPAIGN AND FOR THE PARTICIPATION OF ITALY. POLITICAL INTRIGUES AND FIRST MILITARY OPERATIONS.

THE great victory of our army on the Italian front with which the war came to an end made the Italian public almost forget the deeds achieved by Italian troops on other fronts, and particularly in Macedonia. This has happened not only in Italy ; even France and Britain, who had far larger contingents in Macedonia than ours, do not seem to have appreciated at their full value the operations in that area. There was a whole school of strategists, professional and amateur, competent and incompetent, known as the "Westerners," who desired that every effort should be concentrated exclusively on the French and Italian fronts, and that the operations on the various Eastern fronts should be neglected or even abandoned altogether. Until the Balkan offensive of September 1918, that front, in the opinion of the great majority of the public and even in that of many political and military circles, was of small importance ; according to the pure "Westerners," the Salonica expedition was an error in its very origin, and a useless dispersion of troops who might have been more usefully employed elsewhere. There were even those who maintained the necessity of withdrawing the troops already sent to the East, and others who, although they did not go quite so far, were opposed to any increase of the forces in Macedonia, and even objected to their being provided with the necessary reinforcements and materials.

In support of this view it must be admitted that the Salonica expedition absorbed a vast quantity of tonnage, at a moment when tonnage in all the Entente countries was dangerously scarce, and when the voyage between England, France, Italy and Macedonia was extremely risky on account of submarines. It is also true that for about three years that expedition produced no tangible results; so much so that the Germans called it with ironical satisfaction their largest concentration camp, "an enemy army, prisoner of itself."

Yet it was with the victorious offensive of September, 1918, that the Entente struck the first knock-down blow at the Central Powers and produced the first real breach in the enemy barrier which helped the armies in France and Italy to achieve final victory. Even Marshal von Ludendorff, in his memoirs, recognized the enormous importance of the Allied victory in the Balkans. Until September 15th, 1918, in fact, the enemy's line of chief resistance from the North Sea to the Swiss frontier, from the Stelvio to the mouth of the Piave, from the Voyussa to the Struma, was intact. When the Balkan front collapsed, the whole of the rest of the enemy front in the West as in the East was threatened by a vast encircling movement, the moral effect of which was not less serious than its material consequences.

But it was not only at the moment of the victorious offensive that the Eastern expedition justified itself. Even in the preceding period of long and enervating suspense, the presence of the Allied armies in Macedonia had an importance which was far from indifferent with regard to the general economy of the war. Owing to causes which we shall subsequently examine, the Army of the Orient<sup>1</sup> had not been able to carry out the task originally assigned to it of bringing aid to invaded Serbia and saving her from her extreme ruin, and it was therefore believed that that army had no longer any *raison d'être*. The truth, however, is very different, because for months and years it mounted guard in the Balkans, preventing the Central Empires

<sup>1</sup> The official designation of the Macedonian force was "Allied Armies in the Orient," but it was often abbreviated to "Army of the Orient."



from reaching Salonica and invading Old Greece,<sup>1</sup> where they might have established innumerable new submarine bases and thus dominated the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean. This would have rendered any traffic with Egypt and consequently with India and Australia practically impossible, that is to say, with some of the most important sources of supply for the whole of the Entente and particularly for Italy. If the Army of the Orient was enmeshed amidst the marshes and arid rocks of Macedonia, on the other hand that Army nailed down the whole of the Bulgarian Army, consisting of close on three-quarters of a million men,<sup>2</sup> amply provided with artillery both Bulgarian and German, throughout the whole of the war, and for a time certain German and Turkish divisions as well, forces which might themselves have been employed elsewhere. Incidentally, the operations in Albania against the Austrians could not have been maintained without the support of the Army of the Orient on its right.

In Italy, perhaps more than elsewhere, the advantages of the Macedonian expedition were doubted, and in many political and military circles, as well as among the mass of the public, the current of opinion was opposed to any Italian participation in the operations of that sector. Even when Italian participation had been decided upon, and the Italian expeditionary force was actually in Macedonia, it was not always possible for it to obtain all that it needed, and the command had to struggle hard to obtain the indispensable minimum of reinforcements and materials. Even among the officers of that force, many considered Italian intervention in the East useless and even harmful. Various reasons contributed to this opinion. In the first place, the fact that Italy's war aims were at the gates of Italy and not in the Balkans influenced public feeling in general. Secondly, the fact that our expeditionary force was in a subordinate position seemed

<sup>1</sup> I use the expression "Old Greece" to indicate the territory of the Greek Kingdom as it was before the acquisition of Southern Macedonia in consequence of the Balkan War of 1912-13.

<sup>2</sup> It is not true, as is generally believed, that Bulgarian units were employed on other fronts except in Roumania.

to many to be derogatory to Italian dignity ; a feeling which may be compared with the one that the war with Austria was in a certain sense apart from the general World War. This attitude, which lasted to the end, has been very injurious to our interests in the Balkans and elsewhere, and those among us who really felt the inter-Allied character of the war have had to struggle without ceasing both to convince our dissident compatriots of their error, and to prove to the Allies that those who maintained the purely Italian character of the war only represented a part of Italian public opinion, and that part not the best informed.

Yet Italy's participation in the Eastern expedition was inevitable. Independently of boundary questions of a general character, it was not possible that Italy should remain absent from that area, which subsequent events have proved to be extremely important. Even before the war we had great political and economic interests in the Balkans, interests in part destroyed and in part menaced by the Austrians and Germans in the course of the campaign ; it was absolutely necessary that we ourselves should participate in reconstructing them, instead of leaving this work entirely to others. Further, in the new settlement which the war would create in the Near East, fresh interests and new currents of trade were bound to be created. For this reason too it was necessary that Italy by her presence should participate directly in shaping this new settlement. We complain now that our interests in the East are not sufficiently recognized and respected, but how could we have claimed recognition and respect for them if we had had no share at all in the Macedonian campaign ? Above all, what would have been our prestige among the Balkan peoples if the latter had seen the victorious troops of France, Britain, Serbia and even Greece marching past, and not those of Italy ? Our victory in Italy would not have sufficed to affirm our position among the Balkan peoples if they had not seen us take part in the victory won in their own homelands. It would indeed have been better if our participation had been far greater and our expeditionary force on a far larger scale.

The vicissitudes of the Army of the Orient are much less known than those of all the other armies in the World War, and in particular those of the Italian expeditionary force are largely ignored by the public, even in Italy. Many believe that it was merely a modest contingent, because it was called the "35th Infantry Division," whereas in reality its strength was superior to that of an army corps; and considering the conditions of the area where it was fighting, its importance was equal to that of an army. It is with the object of making known to the public a little more of the actions of that fine unit and the debt of gratitude which the country owes to its officers and men for their long and arduous struggle, conducted in one of the most pestilent climates in Europe amid great hardship, and the increase of Italy's prestige obtained by their merit, that I have undertaken to write these pages.

When the World War broke out, Austria immediately commenced an offensive against Serbia, and the Entente Powers could not at first send assistance to the latter on account of her geographical situation, as she was surrounded on all sides by enemy or neutral States, except to the south-west, but communications through Montenegro were extremely difficult, and by that route only a few volunteers penetrated into Serbia. Supplies and armies could arrive by way of Salonica, but always in the face of serious difficulties, both on account of the obstruction offered by Greece, whose neutrality was not benevolent, and of the attempts made by Bulgarian bands, with or without the approval of the Sofia Government, which was also neutral but still less benevolent, to cut the Vardar railway. The Serbians, however, had proved themselves in the first months of the war capable of defending their country, and they inflicted serious defeats on the Austrians, first at Tzer, in the loop formed by the Save and the Danube, in September, 1914, and later on in the winter at Valievo, where the hostile army, after having occupied Belgrade and penetrated into the heart of Serbia, was beaten and put to flight, leaving thousands of prisoners and vast booty in the hands of the Serbians,

Nevertheless the Serbians were in urgent need of assistance. Their food situation was still very grave, their supply of arms and munitions quite inadequate, and a terrible epidemic of spotted typhus was raging throughout the country. But in addition to material obstacles, the very psychology of the people rendered it difficult to assist them. In the spring of 1915, when the intervention of Italy was certain, the Serbs had a chance of inflicting a new and perhaps decisive defeat on the Austrians by co-operating with us. France, Great Britain, and Russia then brought strong pressure to bear on the Serbian Government to induce it to launch an offensive in the direction of Agram at the moment when the Italians were about to attack on the Isonzo. The Government agreed, and submitted a plan of operations to the Allies, which was approved, but just when it should have been put into execution, the Serbian Army did not move; as a result of fresh pressure on the part of the Allies the Government again promised to attack, but again did nothing. Finally, when this pressure was renewed for the third time, reinforced, it is said, by a personal letter from the Tsar, Belgrade replied at the last moment that it had decided not to attack in the direction of Croatia, because it wished to carry out another plan against Bulgaria, who was still neutral! The reasons for this sudden change in the decisions of the Serbian Government must be sought in the influence of the secret societies which permeate the whole political life of the country, and especially the army. The most important of these societies was the notorious "Black Hand," to which many of the regicide officers belonged. Although the Government itself was apparently favourable to the action proposed by the Entente, which offered great possibilities of success, inasmuch as the Austrians had only a small body of troops in Croatia, it was not strong enough to resist the influence of the secret societies, who placed their veto on any action in co-operation with Italy.<sup>1</sup> The full details of this affair are not

<sup>1</sup> From private sources of information. See also in this connexion, *Une Episode de Drame Serbe*, by Senator M. Sarraut and Lieut.-Colonel Revol (Paris, Hachette 1919), *passim*.



quite clear, but one thing is certain, and that is that owing to Serbia's inaction Austria was able to withdraw five out of the six divisions which were left on the Save and send them to the Italian front. At that period of the war the Serbian front was considered in the Austrian Army almost as a rest camp.

In the autumn of 1915 the Serbian *débâcle* took place, caused chiefly by the Bulgarian attack. The intervention of Turkey on the side of the Central Empires had rendered Bulgaria's position extremely difficult, but that was not the chief reason of the latter's intervention. Bulgaria had remained profoundly dissatisfied with the results of the Peace of Bucarest (1913), which brought the Turko-Balkan War to an end and deprived her of a great part of the fruits of her victory against the Turks. The fault was to a large extent her own, because she had attacked her ex-Allies, Serbia and Greece, and had been completely defeated by them; she then lost not only the whole of Macedonia, to conquer which she had entered the war, but also Eastern Thrace, with Adrianople and Kirk-Kilisse, which were reoccupied by the Turks when the Bulgarian Army had been beaten by the Serbs and Greeks, and a part of Dobrugia which had belonged to her since the creation of the Bulgarian State in 1878, and had been annexed by Roumania, who had intervened in the war at the last moment. This left a bitter feeling of spite in the soul of the Bulgarians, and sowed the seeds of a future war of revenge.

This violent irritation against the Serbs, Greeks and Roumanians was not the only cause which threw the Bulgarians into the arms of the Central Empires, and of their former mortal enemies, the Turks. Their main aspiration—almost their only one since the creation of the Bulgarian State—has been Macedonia. The Dobrugia and Thrace are of comparatively small interest to them, whereas Macedonia, on the contrary, is the bourne of all their desires. In Thrace and in the Dobrugia the population is very mixed, and the Bulgarians, in spite of the statistics drawn up by the Sofia Government, are a minority, and the non-Bulgarian elements of the population—Turks,



Greeks, Roumanians—are racially entirely different. In Macedonia, on the other hand, at least in Central and Northern Macedonia, the great majority is Slav, and the Bulgarians consider it Bulgarian. In reality the population is racially and linguistically something between Serbian and Bulgarian, and the predominance of Serbian or Bulgarian sentiments varies according to the proximity of the frontier of one or other of these States, the activity of their respective propagandists, and the greater or less prestige and strength of the two Governments. I will not quote statistics which, being drawn up by Balkan writers, have a doubtful value and no scientific basis, but it is certain that the Bulgarian peoples are convinced that if Macedonia were annexed to Bulgaria, in a few years the population would become wholly Bulgarian, so that the State would find itself with a considerable increase of inhabitants—not aliens who cannot be assimilated, such as Greeks, Roumanians or Turks, whose territories can only be Bulgarianized by massacre or deportation *en masse*, but of a race which is already very closely akin to the Bulgarian race. Further, in Macedonia there are several cities closely connected with the most ancient and sacred historical traditions of the Bulgarian peoples, such as Monastir and Ochrida. The latter was indeed for a time the capital of the Bulgarian Empire and for many centuries the see of the Bulgarian patriarchate. Bulgarian propaganda had always been much more active and more able than that of the Serbians under the Turkish régime, a propaganda based on excellent schools and assassinations, and, as until the wars of 1912–13, the Bulgarians appeared to be the most solid, and from a military point of view the strongest of the Balkan States, Bulgaria exercised a powerful force of attraction over the Macedonians. In consequence of this propaganda and of Turkish persecutions, a large number of active and intelligent Macedonians migrated into Bulgaria, where they occupied many important positions in the country. A large part of the political men, diplomats, consuls, high officials, professors, schoolmasters, officers and merchants in Bulgaria are Macedonians, and they have long dominated the internal and

foreign policy of the country, directing it naturally towards Macedonia. On the whole, Bulgarian feeling predominates over Serbian or Greek feeling throughout almost the whole of Macedonia.

During the Turko-Balkan War, the Bulgarians had conquered a large part of Macedonia and Thrace, and their legitimate aspirations might thus have been satisfied, but, owing to the mad ambition of their Government, or rather of a small number of ambitious officers, they attempted to obtain a great deal more, and threw themselves without reflecting into the foolhardy enterprise which was the second Balkan War. The unfortunate result of that campaign made them lose the whole of their conquests, with the exception of Western Thrace and the districts of Strumitza and Djumaya forming part of Macedonia. They retained, it is true, the port of Dede-Agatch and the railway connecting it with the rest of Bulgaria, passing through a strip of Turkish territory (Sufli-Demotika-Adrianople-Mustafa Pasha). But if they were justly prevented from obtaining satisfaction for these exaggerated ambitions, they were on the other hand deprived of territories to which on national grounds they had some legitimate claims. The Serbian authorities in Macedonia, while maintaining that that country was purely Serbian, showed by their policy that they considered the population preponderantly Bulgarian, inasmuch as they instituted a system of such extreme and rigorous terrorism as is only explicable on the ground that they were ruling over a conquered territory, whose inhabitants were hostile to them, and must be kept down by force.

The Bulgarian aspiration to regain Macedonia was by no means eliminated by the unfortunate outcome of the second Balkan War. On the contrary, it was strengthened and embittered, and when the World War broke out Bulgaria regarded it merely from the point of view of a possible readjustment of the Macedonian frontier in her own favour. I have been told that the Bulgarian Prime Minister, when a British diplomat went to see him a short time before Bulgaria entered the war, pointed to a map of the Balkans on the wall and said: "We care little about the British,

Germans, French, Russians, Italians or Austrians ; our only thought is Macedonia ; whichever of the two groups of Powers will enable us to conquer it will have our alliance." I do not know if this anecdote is true, but in any case it represents crudely but accurately Bulgarian mentality. The Governments of the Entente understood this state of feeling, but their situation was embarrassing and delicate. They tried to convince Serbia of the necessity of handing over Macedonia, or at least part of it, to Bulgaria, promising her compensation elsewhere. But they did not care to insist too much, because Serbia was an ally, and the compensation offered to her was in territories still retained by the enemy, whereas Bulgaria was a neutral, but a short while ago Serbia's enemy, who was attempting a sort of blackmail, and who hitherto made use of comitadji bands, or at least gave them a free hand, to blow up the bridges on the Vardar, Serbia's only line of supply. Serbia would not hear of this proposal, and in fact intended, as we have seen, to attack Bulgaria before the latter came to a decision ; but the Entente, and particularly the Tsar of Russia, naturally dissuaded them from such action, which would have been little different from that committed by the Germans in invading Belgium. Certainly Serbia would have been wiser had she shown herself more conciliatory towards Bulgaria ; if she had done so, she would have avoided the catastrophe of 1915 and the three terrible years of German-Bulgarian slavery. But the Serbians, we must not forget, are a Balkan people. They have no high political sense nor broad views, and probably even on this occasion the secret societies, with their insatiable and megalomaniac ambitions, brought pressure to bear on the Government to induce it to reject any idea of compromise. However this may be, Serbia did not give way, and the diplomacy of the Entente could do nothing.

The Entente counted much on the sympathy for Russia, which it believed to be very widespread among the Bulgarians, but that sympathy carried no weight in the decisions of the Sofia Government. The Bulgarians, like other Balkan peoples, are vindictive for all offences suffered, and understand gratitude largely in the sense of anticipation





ARCH OF GALERUS, SALONICA.





of benefits to come. In the case of Russia, moreover, their gratitude towards her for having freed them from the Ottoman yoke had been much weakened by the foolish, overbearing and intriguing conduct of the Russian officials in Bulgaria after 1878. The Bulgarians quickly forgot the thousands of Russians who had fallen at Plevna for Bulgarian liberty, but they retained a lively recollection of the persecutions and brutality of Generals Kaulbars and Ernroth, and of their satellites who misgoverned the country for many years; of Russia's illicit interference in their internal affairs at the time of Prince Alexander of Battenberg; and of the fact that Russia abandoned Bulgaria when she was attacked without warning or provocation by Serbia in 1885. By the summer of 1915 the Bulgarians had come to the conclusion that the Central Empires were stronger than the Entente, and that the former therefore offered them a better chance of reconquering Macedonia than the latter. On September 10th, 1915, a general mobilization was ordered in Bulgaria, and on the 29th Bulgarian troops attacked Serbia at Kadibogaz, without a formal declaration of war.

Bulgarian intervention had, however, already been decided upon for some time. Bulgaria had obtained a loan from Germany which tied her hand and foot, and, further, after protracted negotiations promoted by Germany, she had concluded on September 6th an agreement with Turkey, whereby the latter granted her a rectification of the frontiers, so that the railway between Dede-Agatch and the rest of Bulgaria should pass wholly through Bulgarian territory. There were two immediate consequences of Bulgarian intervention. The first was that Turkey could now receive supplies from Germany with greater facility because there was only a small strip of Serbian territory to be invaded so as to establish communications by way of the Danube, and it was very soon occupied. The second consequence, which was a result of the first, was that the situation of the Allies on the Dardanelles became far more critical. The British Command knew that the arrival of powerful German artillery at Gallipoli was imminent, and that as soon as it was in

position the situation of the Allied expeditionary force would become very precarious. The fact that Bulgaria was now an ally of the Central Powers greatly facilitated the sending of this artillery, and it was on the eve of its arrival that the evacuation of the blood-stained peninsula was decided upon.

Germany, after the various Austrian defeats in Serbia, determined to take the command of a new punitive expedition herself, and in view of the co-operation of Bulgaria she had concentrated a powerful Austro-German army, amply supplied with artillery, including guns of the heaviest calibre, in South Hungary under the command of the German Field-Marshal von Mackensen. The invasion of Serbia was carried out by the Austrians and Germans from the north and also from the west (from Bosnia), and by the Bulgarian Army from the east and south-east. The Serbians fought heroically, opposing a desperate resistance on three fronts, and at one moment it seemed as if they might miraculously succeed; perhaps indeed they might have saved themselves, or at least avoided the extreme disaster, if they had only followed the advice of the Allies. But although it soon became known that a new and more formidable attempt was about to be made by the enemy to crush Serbia definitely, the Serbs refused to create a modern defensive system of trenches and wire entanglements, which in a mountainous territory such as that of Serbia would at least have held up the invaders for a considerable time. To the suggestions made by the Allies that these methods be adopted, the Serbs replied with typical Balkan vaingloriousness: "Wire entanglements and trenches are all very well for the Germans and Austrians, for the French, Italians, British or Russians, but we have no use for them; we fight in the open and drive out the enemy." Their victories over the Austrians had made them lose their heads and forget that these victories were not due solely to their own courage but also, to a considerable extent, to the serious strategical and tactical errors of the Austrian commanders, from General Potiorek downwards, errors which were not repeated by Marshal von Mackensen. The new invasion carried out by

the formidable Austro-German Army to which we have referred, and there came also the stab in the back on the part of the Bulgarians.

The enemy had 12 German and Austrian divisions advancing up the Morava valley, and 7 Bulgarian divisions (divisions of 6 regiments each, many of whose regiments were of 4 battalions), which pushed forward in the direction of the Nish-Uskub railway. Altogether these forces comprised 341 battalions, of which 111 were German, 53 Austro-Hungarian, and 177 Bulgarian; against these forces the Serbs could only oppose 194 battalions—116 against the Austrians and Germans, and 78 against the Bulgarians. They were, moreover, exhausted by the long struggle, and reduced to about half their organic strength. Serbia had been deprived of her lines of supply via the Morava and Toplitza valleys by the enemy invasion. The only hope for her army was to establish a connexion with the relieving forces which the Allies were preparing to send up from Salonica. On October 17th the railway was cut at Vrania, thus interrupting communications with Salonica; on the 27th Veles and Uskub were occupied.

As soon as the preparations for a new enemy invasion of Serbia were known, the Entente decided to send an expeditionary force to Salonica and at the same time decided, as we have seen, to withdraw the Dardanelles force.<sup>1</sup> This decision was taken at the end of September, and on the 29th a mission, comprised of one British and two French officers departed from Mudros for Salonica with very vague orders. On reaching their destination, they set to work to prepare for the disembarkation of the troops, but they found themselves faced with the most insidious obstruction on the part of the Greek authorities. The Athens Government, of which M. Venizelos was president, had given its unwilling consent to the landing of the Allies, but the civil officials and the military commanders on the spot did everything to interfere with their operations. The first Allied contingents were British and French troops from the Dardanelles. They were elements

<sup>1</sup> The final withdrawal took place later.



of the 10th British Division commanded by General Sir Bryan Mahon, who for some time commanded all the British troops in Macedonia, and of the 156th French Division commanded by General Bailloud. The landing began on October 5th, and in a short time the 2 divisions were complete, although reduced in strength by sickness and losses to very weak effectives. Later, the 57th French Division arrived. On October 12th General Sarrail arrived at Salonica as Commander of all the French troops in the Orient. For a considerable time nothing was decided as to the relations between the different commands in Macedonia, and although the rank of Commander-in-Chief had been conferred on General Sarrail, the British Commander, and later also the Serbian Commander, insisted on maintaining their own autonomy. It was not until June 23, 1916, that an agreement was concluded on this matter between the French and British General Staffs, but even this was somewhat vague. "The question of the Command," this document states, "is regulated by the following formula: Instructions concerning the initial offensive as well as the line of conduct necessary for the further development of operations will be established by mutual agreement between the French and British Commands. It is thus understood that the Commander of the British forces will give the Commander of the French forces assistance and co-operation in proportion to the effectives and equipment of the troops under his orders. He will be responsible, however, to the British Government for the employment of his forces. The Commander of the French forces will consult with the Commander of the British forces as to the manner in which the latter shall be employed; with this reserve, he will have as Commander-in-Chief authority to establish the duties and objectives to be attained, the area of action, and the date for the commencement of operations."<sup>1</sup> It is easy to see that the authority of General Sarrail over the British Commander was quite illusory. His orders might be discussed, and they were. Field-Marshal French had said clearly to the British Commander in Macedonia: "You will never be

<sup>1</sup> Mermeix, *Le commandement unique*, second part, pp. 23-24.

in a subordinate position," and in fact every time that Sarraïl sought to make use of the British or even French troops, temporarily placed under British Command, he had to conduct negotiations as if it were a political act. We shall see subsequently why it was that he never succeeded in imposing his authority, but the fact certainly did not contribute to the success of the operations in the Near East.

Day by day fresh troops and fresh material arrived at Salonica, but the ill-will of the Greek authorities rendered everything difficult. The buildings which the Allies needed were always found to have been already requisitioned by the Greeks, so that the French and British had to encamp on Zeitenlik, a spot at 5 km. to the north of Salonica, at that time, before the drainage works afterwards carried out by the Allies, infected with malaria. In the purchase of foodstuffs and material every sort of difficulty was encountered. Worse still, every movement of the Allies was spied upon by and communicated to the enemy, either indirectly via Athens by the Greek authorities, or directly by the German, Austrian, Bulgarian and Turkish Consuls, who continued to reside in Salonica. The situation was absolutely preposterous—an Entente army operating in a neutral country which was friendly to the enemy.

On November 17th, 1915, the Anglo-French troops were about 120,000, of whom two-thirds were French, and on the 20th a fresh British division arrived, but they were still far from the 300,000 men deemed necessary for operations on a large scale. There was another greater danger which was anything but indifferent. The Greek Army, comprised about 240,000 men, of whom half were in Macedonia, and if its military value was not very formidable, it might have, in alliance with the enemy, represented a serious menace to the Entente.

The initial objective of the Allies was to bring assistance to the Serbs who were retreating before the Austro-German and Bulgarian invasion. This assistance was to have taken the form of an advance up the Vardar Valley towards Uskub or towards Monastir. As soon as the troops were landed at Salonica they were immediately pushed forward towards the front, the British to the east of the Vardar



and the French to the west. On October 20th the French reached Krivolak on the Vardar and occupied the whole peninsula formed by that river and the Cerna, while the British were to the north of lake of Doiran, on the Kosturino Pass on the Beles Mountains, whence it is possible to descend into Bulgaria. The Serbs were being driven ever further south, but a detachment of their army was holding Monastir. If they had followed the advice of the Allies and had retreated towards them, perhaps a part of the army might have been saved; but, attracted by the mirage of an outlet on the Adriatic, or for some other motive, they insisted on deviating towards the west, thus undertaking that retreat across Albania which was to prove one of the most terrible tragedies of the whole war. Before the invasion the Serbian Army comprised 400,000 men, when it reached Albania it was reduced to 150,000, with some tens of thousands of Austrian prisoners; the rest had died of hunger and suffering. This miserable remnant was saved by the assistance of the Allies, and particularly of the Italians, as we shall see further on. The retreat through Albania rendered the situation of the Anglo-French on the middle Vardar untenable. When the French learnt that the Bulgarians had occupied the Babuna Pass between Veles and Monastir at the beginning of November, they tried to break the enemy front on the left bank of the Cerna in the hope of reaching the Serbs to the north-west of that pass. For fifteen days (November 5-19th) a fierce struggle went on between the French and the Bulgarians, in which our Allies showed all their admirable military qualities. The Bulgarians counter-attacked on the Cerna and were repulsed with heavy losses, but as the bulk of the Serbian Army had retreated towards Albania and the French had been unable to capture the dominating position of Mount Arkhangel (west of Gradsko on the Vardar), the offensive passed definitely to the Bulgarians. On the 2nd, General Sarraill ordered a general retreat from Krivolak on Salonica. Even this operation was anything but easy. It was necessary to withdraw 3 divisions (the 122nd had been recently added to the 156th and 57th) and an enormous quantity of material along the Vardar Valley over a single-

track railway and without decent carriage roads, in a season when the rains converted the whole country into a vast muddy swamp. It must be admitted that General Sarrail conducted this retreat in good order. The Bulgarians were attacking from the north towards Krivolak and from the west on the Cerna, while from the east they were attacking the British at Kosturino, while irregular bands were trying to capture convoys along the Vardar, and enemy artillery from the Beles range dominated the railway. Added to this there was rain, snow and cold.

There were two plans of retreat, which may be described as the maximum and the minimum. The first consisted in withdrawing to the entrenched camp at Salonica, the other in resisting on an intermediate position between the Krivolak-Cerna line and Salonica along the Greek frontier. The first had the advantage of considerably shortening the line to be defended, and of bringing it nearer to the base: but on the other hand, besides adversely affecting the prestige of the Allies, it would have left the road from Macedonia and Albania into Old Greece open to the enemy, thus renewing and reinforcing German pressure on King Constantine in favour of Greek intervention on the side of the Central Empires. In that case Salonica, and with it the whole of the Allied Armies, would have been irreparably lost. Consequently the second plan was adopted.

The French retreat was carried out by echelons. First the detachments on the left of the Cerna were withdrawn to the right bank and the bridge at Vozartzi destroyed. Then a concentration took place at Krivolak, which was the rail-head, and the troops retreated in four stages. The Bulgarian attacks near the Cerna having been repulsed, the French reached Demir-Kapu without difficulty. They passed through the narrow gorge by night, while the rear-guard covered the retreat. The Bulgarians tried to outflank the French, advancing by mountain paths on the Marianska Planina so as to fall on them when emerging from the gorge, but their attempt failed. On December 7th the bridge and tunnel at Strumitza were blown up. On the 8th, although exhausted by the interminable march, the French repulsed still other enemy attacks. The great

depots at Ghevgheli were evacuated, and on the 10th, as the Bulgarians were attacking along the river, the convoys had to continue their retreat over the mountains. The two African march regiments counter-attacked with great vigour, and on the 11th, the depots having been burnt and the railway and the bridge destroyed, all the troops withdrew beyond the Greek frontier.

The British (10th Division), who occupied the area between the Vardar, the Lake of Dorian and the Kosturino Pass, were not attacked until the end of November, but on December 6th the Germans and Bulgarians attacked and the British commenced their withdrawal. On the 12th they too had crossed the Greek frontier between Ghevgheli and Doiran, and the enemy did not advance farther for the time being.

The enemy had by now occupied the whole of Serbia, including Monastir, which had been evacuated on December 5th, the Serbian garrison having withdrawn to Salonica, but for political reasons they did not wish to cross the Greek frontier, as they considered the Greece of King Constantine (Venizelos having fallen) a benevolent neutral. This gave the Allies breathing space and time to reinforce themselves. On December 3rd, the French Government ordered General Sarraill to create an entrenched camp at Salonica. The area from Topshin to Dogandzi and Daudli was entrusted to the French, that from Daudli to the sea, passing along the Lakes of Langaza and Besik and through the Rendina gorge, to the British. The former had their usual 3 divisions, the British five (22nd, 28th, 26th, 10th, and in addition the 27th without artillery in reserve at Salonica). Within two months the first positions were created with three lines of resistance and a barbed wire entanglement 10 metres broad defended by 30 heavy batteries. These defences had been made according to all the latest scientific rules of war, and had the advantage of not having been constructed under the pressure of the enemy, as was the case with the great entrenched camps in France. Of the three lines of defence, the first and second were in excellent condition, whereas the third was merely sketched. The works were in groups of three,



so that the two more advanced ones were dominated by the one in the rear. They were united to each other by communication trenches, which could also be used as firing trenches. Beyond the entrenched camp the Allies occupied advanced positions, the French as far as Sorovich, and later (March 21st, 1916) Florina, and farther east along the railway between Kilkish and Kilindir; the British towards the Lake Doiran.

Allies and enemies now stopped along the line which they were to occupy without important change for several months. The enemy lines passed to the south of Kenali (on the railway between Florina and Monastir) along the ridge of Mount Kaimakchalan and thence along the mountains to Lake Doiran. Beyond the lake they ascended on to the crest of the Beles mountains, following the Græco-Bulgarian frontier of 1913. The enemy attack was expected from week to week, but it did not come, and in the meanwhile the Allies continued to receive reinforcements (French and British) and material, and they were able to strengthen their defences and improve their situation.

In all there were at the beginning of 1916 a little less than 100,000 French troops, about as many British and a few thousand Serbs, altogether about 200,000 men to defend the entrenched camp, forming an arc of a circle of 120 kilometres, in addition to the advanced positions. There were 358 French and 350 British guns, but the heaviest French guns were only long 155 mm. and the heaviest British were of 6 in. General Sarrail had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies in the Orient. The British Army, in May, 1916, was commanded by Lieutenant-General George (now Sir George) Milne, under the superior command, although in a limited measure, of General Sarrail. The enemy forces amounted to about 280,000 men.

The results of these operations, although disaster had been avoided, cannot be regarded as brilliant, nor were they of such character as to raise the prestige of General Sarrail with the Allies, nor of the Allies in general with the enemy States and those who were still neutral. A well-

executed retreat without heavy losses in men or material may be a fine operation from a technical point of view, but it does not arouse enthusiasm. On the other hand, the relative conditions of the two armies amounted to a situation of stalemate from which it would not be easy to emerge. General Lord Kitchener, who had come to inspect the Macedonian Army in December 1915, had actually proposed the withdrawal of the expedition, which appeared to him as to many other experts a useless dispersion of forces, and the Governments were in doubt as to whether or not it were advisable to carry out this suggestion. But in the course of 1916 the Allies received a new reinforcement, in the shape of the revived Serbian Army, which was destined to exercise a considerable political and military influence on the future vicissitudes of the Oriental campaign.

The disastrous retreat through Albania in which the Serbian Army had lost nearly all its artillery and more than half its effectives, took refuge in Corfu, save a few detachments which were sent to Bizerta. In Corfu the exhausted and worn-out soldiers rested, were re-equipped with everything and thoroughly reorganized. As soon as they began to recover from their terrible experiences they wished to go to Macedonia to take part in the Allied operations. They began to reach Salonica in the spring of 1916, and at the end of April there were about 15,000 of them, besides the detachment formed of the men who had escaped from Monastir. At the end of June they amounted to 120,000 and in July to 152,000. They were divided into three armies, each comprising two divisions: I Army (Morava and Vardar Division); II (Shumadia and Timok) and III (Drina and Danube), in addition to the cavalry division and the volunteer corps, with 72 machine-gun sections. The artillery was supplied to a great extent by the French, except for a few guns saved in the retreat, to which some others captured from the enemy were afterwards added. They had 6 groups of 75 mm., 6 of 80 mm. mountain batteries (afterwards replaced by 65 mm. quick-firing guns), 6 groups of Krupp 70 mm. or Schneider 75 mm. mountain guns, 6 groups of 120 mm. howitzers, 6 batteries of 58 mm.



trench guns. Scattered about the mountains along the border between Macedonia and Albania and in Macedonia there were irregular Serbian comitadji bands estimated, in July 1916, at about 5,000 men, who broke up and reformed according to circumstances, now attempting a raid, now hiding among the mountains. Other bands continued to exist in Old Serbia, and in fact they rose in revolt in the winter of 1916-17, causing serious anxiety to the enemy; the movement, however, was ruthlessly repressed.

But the situation of the Allies continued to be made extremely difficult by the conduct of the Greek authorities who, although officially neutral, were in reality most unfriendly. They had created a regular system of espionage in favour of the Central Empires, headed by Colonel Messalas, who sent reports of every variation in the strength and distribution of the Allied troops to the Ministry of War at Athens and to the King and Queen, whence they reached the German G.H.Q. The Consuls of the enemy States were naturally extremely active in this work of espionage and the Allied G.H.Q., owing to its peculiar situation, and not wishing to come to a regular breach with Greece, either because it was feared that she might definitely go over to the enemy or in the hope of inducing her to join the Entente, had its hands tied. When, however, in consequence of information supplied by enemy agents, German aeroplanes bombed the city, causing considerable damage, and killing a number of people, General Sarrail declared that he would henceforth consider the area occupied by the Allies as a war zone, and on the night of December 30th Franco-British patrols arrested the four enemy consuls and seized their archives, whence they obtained valuable information concerning enemy spies. A British detachment had on its own account arrested the German Consul at Drama in the train near Serres, in spite of violent rhodomontades and protests of the Greek officers in the same compartment.

Graver anxiety was caused by the Greek Army. At the end of 1915, its distribution was as follows: The I and II Corps were in Old Greece, except the artillery, which

was between Salonica and Vassilika ; the III Corps was echeloned between Salonica, Yenidje-Vardar, Verria, Ekshisu, Banitza and Florina ; the IV between Serres and Drama, and the V between Langaza and Guvesne. In theory the Greek troops were to guard the frontier, preventing the Germans and Bulgarians from violating it, but none of the Allies had the slightest confidence that they would have offered any resistance to an attempt at invasion, even if they did not actively co-operate in it. Further, Greek officers and officials conducted an active and lucrative contraband in favour of the "hereditary enemy." The British writer, G. Ward Price, notes that it is remarkable how instinctively the soldiers of the various Allied Armies—the most heterogeneous collection of characters, types and standards of conduct—were agreed in hating the Greeks at that time.<sup>1</sup>

The Allies now began to bring pressure to bear on the Greek Government in order that the Greek Army should be withdrawn from Macedonia and demobilized. On January 28th an Anglo-French detachment, with the co-operation of warships, among which was the Italian cruiser *Piemonte*, occupied the forts of Karaburun, south-east of Salonica, the port of which is dominated by them, and expelled the Greek garrison. On the night of January 31st–February 1st, a German Zeppelin bombarded Salonica ; it was afterwards brought down and destroyed near the mouth of the Vardar, and at the same time luminous signals were seen coming from the city. General Sarraïl, who since January 15th had assumed the control of the police, the railways and the telegraph, seized the occasion to proclaim the state of siege. The chief of the French *Sûreté* and the British A.P.M. proceeded little by little to cleanse the town of suspicious elements, and there was good need of it. In the meanwhile the Greek troops slowly and unwillingly began to evacuate Macedonia. On May 23rd, 1916, the Germano-Bulgar Army, on the pretext that the Allies were carrying out threatening movements in the Serres area, crossed the Greek frontier and demanded the evacuation of Fort Rupel dominating

<sup>1</sup> *Story of the British Salonica Army*, p. 97.

the narrow defile through which the Struma opens its way to the east Macedonian plain and flows down to the sea. The Commander of the garrison made a feeble protest, fired a few shots to salve his conscience, and asked for instructions from Athens. These were to the effect that he should hand over the fort with all its material, which he did with enthusiasm. In conformity with analogous instructions, the whole of the IV Corps, distributed through the Serres area and commanded by Colonel Hadzopoulos, surrendered to the Bulgarians and Germans, except 2,500 men of the Serres Division who, with their Commander, Colonel Christodoulos, refused to submit to this dishonour and managed to escape to the island of Thasos, whence in September they were transported to Salonica and formed the nucleus of the future Venizelist army.

The conduct of the Greek Government is explained by some retrospective history. M. Venizelos, although convinced of the erroneous policy pursued by King Constantine, hesitated to promote an open rebellion against him, also because he saw much weakness and indecision among the Allies. The King had dissolved the Chamber in June 1915, and whereas in that Parliament, which had been elected by 750,000 voters, the majority was in favour of Venizelos, in the new Chamber, elected by only 200,000 voters in December in an illegal manner under Government pressure and threats, the majority was hostile to him. But independently of these illegalities, Greek public opinion was to a great extent opposed to the policy of Venizelos, who desired the intervention of Greece in favour of the Entente, not only in order to meet Greece's obligations of honour towards Serbia, but also in the higher interests of Greece herself. Facts have proved that he was right, but in 1915 the policy of Constantine might well have been deemed the more prudent. Serbia was, like Belgium, invaded and devastated; Bulgaria and Turkey allied to Germany and Austria; one half of Albania occupied by the Austrians and the other half by the Italians—the latter undesired neighbours of Greece—and German terrorist propaganda, which in Italy had failed so miserably, in Greece achieved the success of fear.



“Should we throw ourselves into this conflict and run the risk of seeing our country invaded and devastated?” the Greeks asked themselves, and most of them came to the conclusion that it was better to remain neutral and to make money through war trade; from the point of view of their immediate interests, they were not altogether wrong. It is not true, however, that the whole population was pro-German. The King and the Queen (sister of the Emperor William) were pro-Germans, and so also were nearly the whole of the General Staff, and the majority of the generals and field officers educated in Germany or at least trained according to German methods. The masses were indifferent to the respective moral merits of the two groups of belligerents, and did not want war, and as Constantine would have found it extremely difficult to make war in open alliance with the Central Empires, he tried to help them by remaining neutral. In the popular mind Venizelos consequently came to be synonymous with intervention and Constantine with peace; the people preferred peace. Further, as the army was still mobilized there was a good deal of discontent, and the people regarded Venizelos as responsible for this state of things. Another reason in favour of neutrality was that if Greece had intervened she would have found herself in alliance with Italy, against whom she was much irritated owing to the question of the Dodecanese and Southern Albania. Finally, she had reason to believe that the Allies had offered a considerable part of Macedonia to Bulgaria in September 1915, in the vain hope of obtaining the latter's intervention against the Central Powers. In the meanwhile, Venizelos was awaiting the moment for action. For all these reasons, the surrender of Rupel and of the IV Army Corps did not arouse that reaction which was expected, and which in other circumstances would certainly have occurred. King Constantine had received as a reward for his policy a loan from the Central Empires of 75 million drachmæ, while at the same time he was trying to negotiate another for 125 millions from the Allies. In spite of the declaration of the Prime Minister, M. Skouloudis, in the Chamber, there was a general belief throughout the Allied countries, as even M. Coronillas, Greek Minister in Rome, and his

colleague in Paris, M. Caelamanos admitted, that the Government of King Constantine had concluded an agreement with Thrace, Germany and Bulgaria.<sup>1</sup> The treachery of Rupel and the 4th Corps produced very unfavourable results for the Allies. The whole of Eastern Macedonia fell into the hands of the enemy without a blow having been struck. Demir-Hissar, Serres, Drama, Kavalla were occupied by the Bulgarians, and the fighting line was brought to the course of the Struma from Rupel to the sea, and although these towns might have been retaken without great difficulty, they were dominated by very strong positions on the mountains behind them, which were immediately fortified. For this reason, Great Britain, France and Russia renewed their demands on the Government at Athens in order that all the remaining Greek troops be withdrawn into Greece, the army demobilized, and the anti-Constitutional Government abolished.<sup>2</sup> It will be noted that in all the affairs of Greece it was always these three Governments who acted, and not the Entente as a whole. This was due to the fact that, owing to the London Convention of May 7, 1832, these three Powers were declared the protectors of the Greek Kingdom and of its Constitution. The evacuation of Macedonia was carried out slowly, as was also the demobilization. What remained of the Greek Army was nearly all concentrated in the Peloponnese, where it could be easily watched and prevented from returning towards Macedonia. But the Royal Government did everything in its power to avoid fulfilling its engagements, and while the demobilization was being carried out, leagues of Epistrates (Reservists) were being formed. These associations, organized by officers devoted to King Constantine, constituted a new element hostile to the Entente. Then also, the Government tried to maintain armed forces in Northern Greece by strengthening the gendarmerie and creating hidden deposits of arms. Although the importance of these attempts were much exaggerated, they nevertheless caused some anxiety to the Allied Armies in Macedonia.

<sup>1</sup> See *Documents Diplomatiques*, published by the Greek Foreign Office, Athens 1917, pp. 60, 61, etc., and R. Recouly *Journat*, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Ultimatum of June 21, 1916.



## CHAPTER II

### OPERATIONS IN THE SUMMER AND AUTUMN OF 1916

I HAVE already set forth the reasons wherefore I consider that Italy's participation in the Macedonian expedition was opportune, and indeed indispensable. Our Government was finally convinced of this necessity, but accepted it somewhat unwillingly, both for political and military reasons; consequently our participation was ever maintained within modest proportions. In accordance with the terms of the agreement concluded between ourselves and our Allies, Italy undertook, in the summer of 1916, to participate in the Macedonian expedition with a division, which, however, was only to be provided with mountain artillery; the field and heavy artillery attached to our contingent was to be supplied by the French Army. There were then some good reasons for not endowing these troops too generously with artillery; the Italian Army in general was inadequately provided with guns, and during the Austrian offensive from the Trentino in the spring of that year it had lost many batteries, especially of medium and heavy calibre. These reasons, however, did not continue to exist in the later phases of the campaign, but nevertheless our expeditionary force in the Balkans was never provided with artillery of its own, except with the above-mentioned mountain batteries, a fact which was to cause us considerable difficulties in the future.

Our contingent consisted of the 35th Infantry Division, a name destined to occupy a high place in the roll of honour of the Italian Army, although it has been hitherto less well known than that of many other units. To this division many other detachments had been added which

properly belong to an army corps or even an army. Originally, it had consisted of the Sicilia Brigade (61st and 62nd Infantry Regiments)<sup>1</sup> and the Cagliari Brigade (63rd and 64th), several machine-gun companies, a squadron of the Lucca Light Cavalry (16th Regiment), eight mountain batteries of four 65 mm. guns each, various companies of engineers, transport and other services, etc. The division had achieved an honourable record on the Alpine front, where it had suffered heavy losses; but before coming out to the East it had been reorganized, brought up to full strength, and admirably equipped. The command of the force had been entrusted to General Petitti di Roreto, a very distinguished and gallant officer, and an excellent organizer; his Chief of the Staff was Colonel Garbasso.

The first Italian detachments reached Salonica on August 11, 1916. The fine appearance, smart equipment, and the vigorous and martial aspect of the men in their grey-green uniforms and steel helmets, marching along the quay under the brilliant summer sun, created an excellent impression. Representatives of the various Allied armies were there to receive them, with the band of the Zouaves. The numerous and patriotic Italian colony, which had seen the troops of almost all the other Allied armies arrive—there was even a Russian contingent which had come over from France—was in a paroxysm of excitement when at last it saw the Italian troops and admired the battle flags of our fine regiments fluttering in the breeze. It was not only to strengthen the Allied front in the Orient that it was advisable to send an Italian contingent, but also to affirm Italian prestige among the Balkan peoples, a duty which the 35th Division fulfilled no less well than it accomplished its purely military tasks.

Our expeditionary force was at first destined to take part in an action on the Macedonian front, in co-operation with the Russian and Roumanian offensive, Roumania's

<sup>1</sup> An Italian infantry brigade, commanded by a Brigadier-General or sometimes by a Colonel, comprises two regiments of three battalions each, each battalion of about 1,000 men.

intervention being already decided. But the total strength of all the Allied forces in Macedonia was insufficient for an operation on a large scale, and by the time the Italians had landed this scheme was hardly thought of any longer. General Pettiti was to take orders directly from the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies in the Orient (General Sarraill), as regards the tactical employment of his troops, but he alone was responsible for all the details of their employment, and it was agreed that the Italian division should not be split up.

The Italians had not come to the Balkans to stop in Salonica, and General Pettiti was anxious to be sent to the front at once. He was at first entrusted with the Krusha Balkan sector, east of Lake Doiran and opposite the Beles mountains, a formidable and imposing rock barrier strongly held by the Bulgars. A month after the landing of the first detachment the bulk of the division was already at the front. This area, which had been first held by the 57th French Division, was not then very active, but we had a front of 48 km. to hold with only two brigades; there were no defences to speak of, and everything had to be created anew. In the short time which we occupied it we completely transformed it. Many lines of trenches were dug, wire entanglements laid down, works of all kinds constructed, and, in addition, the whole area was provided by us with a complete network of roads.

At first we were in liaison with the British on our right and the French on our left; besides occupying the Krusha Balkan positions, we also relieved the French in certain advanced positions in the valley between the former range and the Beles. General Pettiti from the first disapproved of this distribution, because the afore-said advanced positions were isolated and so far from the main body of his forces that they could not receive assistance in case of a sudden attack, nor be protected by artillery, being beyond the range of our guns. General Sarraill insisted on those positions being maintained, but the Italian Commander repeatedly requested to be authorized to evacuate them, all the more so as they represented



GENERAL LEBLOIS BIDDING FAREWELL TO GENERAL PETITTI AT TEPAVCI.



LANDING OF ITALIAN TROOPS AT SALONICA.





no military advantage. They were held by a battalion of the 62nd Regiment, of which one company was at Gornji Poroj, a large village at the foot of the Beles range, and the others at other points in the valley. Finally, on September 17th, he received instructions to evacuate them, and he immediately gave the necessary orders. On the day fixed for the withdrawal Gornji Poroj was suddenly attacked by overwhelming Bulgarian forces, but it should be noted that the attack had been provoked by us in order to give support to another attack which the British were carrying out elsewhere. The Gornji Poroj Company (the 6th),<sup>1</sup> was faced by a battalion and a half of Bulgars, and had orders to resist at all costs so as to protect the withdrawal of the other three companies, and it carried out its task with great gallantry. The Bulgarian barrage fire prevented the arrival of reinforcements, and the company was soon entirely surrounded. It continued to hold out throughout the afternoon and night, and it was not until 36 hours after the commencement of the engagement, when its ammunition had given out, that the gallant survivors ended their resistance with a charge. The battalion commander continued to hear in the far distance the cries "Savoia!" and "Viva l'Italia!" without being able to send assistance. Some 180 men failed to answer the roll call. The 8th Company, which had remained at Poroj Station, some distance from the village, to collect stragglers, was also attacked and almost surrounded by superior hostile forces, but managed to effect its withdrawal during the night.

General Petitti soon had occasion to be dissatisfied with the conduct of General Sarraïl towards the Italians. As I have said, we had a French division (the 16th Colonial) on our left. On September 26th the Italian Command learned from General Gérome, without any warning from G.H.Q., that a part of that division was being withdrawn, as well as certain other detachments on the lines of communication which were expected to act as reinforcements for our troops. Thus the Italians found themselves with their left flank in the air and not a single

<sup>1</sup> An Italian regiment comprises 12 companies (4 per battalion).

battalion in support nearer than Salonica, whereas they had 6 Bulgarian regiments directly in front of them and a whole division on their flank. General Sarrail even wanted them to extend their line towards the left so as to relieve the departing troops. General Petitti addressed an energetic protest to General Sarrail against such conduct, refused to extend his front, and referred the matter to the Italian Supreme Command. The protest proved effective, and a British brigade relieved the departing French.

We now found ourselves with the British on our left as well as on our right. From the very first our relations with the British Army had always been of the friendliest nature. This complete collaboration between the armies of the two Allied countries was afterwards intensified on the Italian front, but I do not think that the feeling was anywhere more intimate or cordial than in Macedonia, and this in spite of the insinuations of General Sarrail to General Petitti. During the two years in which the Italians fought on the Macedonian front there was never the slightest conflict or disagreement between ourselves and the British, which is more, I venture to think, than can be said for any other two armies on that front.

Knowledge of the incidents with the Italians reached the French G.H.Q. and General Sarrail received a reprimand from his superiors in consequence. On October 2nd he came to our H.Q. at Karamudi with the Prince Regent of Serbia and two French parliamentary commissioners, and after the usual exchange of compliments, he complained to General Petitti that he had caused him (Sarrail) to be reproved by Marshal Joffre. General Petitti replied that he had merely communicated to the Italian *Comando Supremo* the protest which he had sent to General Sarrail himself. The latter showed him Joffre's telegram, in which it was stated that he had failed to maintain a spirit of *camaraderie* with Petitti; General Petitti then showed him the text of his own telegram to the *Comando Supremo*, whereupon General Sarrail, addressing himself to the Prince Regent of Serbia

and the two deputies, said : " From the cordial manner in which General Petitti has received us, you will gather by what a friendly spirit of *camaraderie* we are united, and how a trifling incident has been magnified." This explained the reason why Sarraïl had induced the Prince Regent of Serbia and the two French political men to accompany him to Karamudli.

Our troops suffered a great deal from malaria, their area being one of the unhealthiest in the country. The broad valley between the Krusha Balkan and the Beles ranges, which had once been thickly populated and well cultivated, was now a desert ; having been abandoned for two years, it constituted a terrible hotbed of malarial fever. The shores of the lakes of Doiran and Butkova, at the two ends of the valley, are marshy, and muddy watercourses flow sluggishly down, widening the fen zone. The troops in the lower positions near the plain were the worst sufferers, and a large part of the malaria cases in the Cerna loop in 1917 and 1918 were in reality relapses from the Krusha Balkan period.

During the spring of 1916 the Germans and Bulgars had been busy preparing for an offensive on a large scale against the Allies. The 11th Bulgarian Division, composed of Macedonian troops, who were not too trustworthy and provided a number of deserters, was dissolved. The Monastir front was strengthened with units drawn from the Dobrugia and Eastern Macedonia. In the spring there were 3 Bulgarian divisions between Strumitza and Xanthi, 3 in the Dobrugia and 5 in the Monastir area, in addition to 2 German divisions, and in July we have the following distribution of forces ; 3 divisions and 1 cavalry brigade in the Dobrugia, 2 brigades and some other units on the Struma, 2 Bulgarian and 1 German division (the only one left in Macedonia) on the Vardar, all these forces being detailed for the attack on the entrenched camp at Salonica. In the Monastir plain there was a mobile reserve for attack consisting of two infantry divisions and 3 cavalry brigades. In all, 8 Bulgarian infantry and 1 cavalry division, 1 German division, and 1 or 2 Turkish divisions. The plan consists

of a rapid offensive on the two wings, with the object of cutting the Allies' retreat towards Greece or Albania,<sup>1</sup> so as to oblige General Sarrail to fight a siege battle and perhaps to capitulate. Since the retreat along the Vardar down to the summer of 1916 Sarrail had had orders to remain on the defensive, but now that the alliance with Roumania had been concluded, the Entente Powers contemplated, as we have seen, an operation in Macedonia to give support to the Roumanian Army and perhaps effect a junction with it. Roumania declared war on August 28th, but she had asked that the Army of the Orient should attack ten days before. It was, on the contrary, the enemy who was the first to attack.

General Sarrail was now "Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies in the Orient," and his command was known as the *Commandement des Armées Alliées*, abbreviated "C.A.A." The French troops under his orders were grouped together under the name of *Armée française d'Orient* (commonly called the "A.F.O."), and then commanded by General Cordonnier. It was the latter who conducted the operations of the summer and autumn of 1916.

On August 17th the Bulgarians crossed the Greek frontier at two points, advancing eastward to the mouth of the Struma and westward towards Lake Ostrovo, which they reached on the 23rd. Soon after they occupied Florina and Banitza, obliging the Serbs, who were holding that area, to fall back on Ekshisu and Sorovich.

Against the enemy the Allies disposed of the following forces: rather less than 200,000 French and British, 120,000 Serbs, 10,000 Russians (who had arrived in July) and 30,000 Italians. The French artillery amounted to 346 guns, the British to 370, the Serbian to 284, ours to 32. The machine guns were a little over 1,300, the cavalry about 3300 sabres. In all 360,000 men, but in reality

<sup>1</sup> It should be borne in mind that there was as yet no contact between the Italian forces in Albania and the Allies in Macedonia. Between the two there was a vast mountain area, sparsely inhabited by Albanians, and almost without roads.



the strengths were much reduced owing to malaria and the difficulties of communications, so that barely half of that number was available.

The enemy had one great advantage as compared with the Allies—the real and effective unity of command. While the greater part of the enemy forces were Bulgarian the chief command was German, and it was exercised without question. The Allies on the other hand only resigned themselves to the unity of command—that of General Sarrail—in July, 1916, and even then most unwillingly. The other Allied commanders had no confidence in Sarrail's military qualities, and above all distrusted him for his taste for petty political intrigue. Consequently he could never exercise that absolute authority which is an indispensable condition for success.

Our expeditionary force took orders from General Sarrail, but when any question of great importance arose, such as the change of sector of the division or of a part of it, the extension of its front, etc., the consent of the Italian *Comando Supremo* was necessary. All this of course interfered with the development of the operations, and General Sarrail complains about his situation in that connexion very bitterly in his memoirs, but it was due to his own defects as recognized by all.

The Bulgarian advance in the Monastir area at one moment made the situation of the Allies appear really critical, because if the enemy had succeeded in breaking through the line on the mountains north of Vodena there would have been nothing more to stop them from descending to the plain and consequently penetrating into Greece, and the Allies would have had to remain besieged within the entrenched camp of Salonica. But the further they advanced the more they became exhausted, whereas while the Serbs fell back they were more and more strongly reinforced. The critical point was the Lake of Ostrovo; on August 22nd the Serb left repulsed five successive attacks on the heights west of the lake between the Kayalar plain and the Rudnik basin, and was subsequently reinforced by a part of the 156th French division. The Allies immediately launched their



counter-offensive, which was also designed to assist the Roumanians, then just commencing hostilities.

On August 25th an Anglo-French incident occurred, neither the first nor the last. General Cordonnier had requested General Sarrail that the French Division on the Vardar, then at the disposal of the British, should be placed under his own orders for the imminent operations towards Monastir. General Sarrail not having authority to give orders to General Milne, merely passed on the request to him; but General Milne would not agree to the departure of more than one French regiment. At the same time General Cordonnier, having placed some French batteries at the disposal of the Serbs, at their own request, sent a French general to the Serbian Army as "artillery commander." This aroused vigorous protests at the Serbian G.H.Q. in Salonica, and the French artillery general had to be satisfied with the title of "adviser."

The duty of the British and of the Italians in the eastern area was to watch the enemy and keep them occupied with demonstrative actions, while the Serbs' objectives were the Malka Nidze and Kaimakchalan mountains, and the French and Russians under Cordonnier were to attack the Bulgarians' flank further west. The attack was to take place on the 12th of September on the western sector, but there were considerable difficulties owing to the great distance from Verria where the reserves were concentrated, and it was by no means easy to distribute them so that they should be at the disposal of General Cordonnier. On the 13th the Serbs advanced fighting, and occupied the Malka Nidze and Ostrovo, capturing 25 guns, the 156th Division pushed on from Kayalar and Rudnik towards Banitza, the Russians towards the Neretzka and the 57th French Division, with the two regiments of Chasseurs d'Afrique, towards Kastoria. On the 17th the French and Russians occupied Florina, and the Serbs, after having driven the Bulgarians from the bare sinister heights of Gornichevo—the pass between the lake of Ostrovo and the Monastir plain—attacked them with fierce energy on the Kaimak-

chalan. The Bulgarians resisted desperately, but the Serbs, spurred on by the incentive of wresting from the enemy a first tract of their invaded fatherland, after a long protracted struggle captured the positions. Barely a hundred Bulgars were taken prisoners; the other defenders were all dead. On September 29th the Bulgars still held a line south of Monastir, passing through Kenali and along the north bank of the Cerna; the French and the Serbs had been ordered by Sarraill to attack once more, but they were repulsed owing to the failure of the artillery preparation.

General Sarraill was determined to achieve a theatrical success at all costs, and on the 28th he ordered a fresh attack for October 2nd in the plain south of Monastir. General Cordonnier, after having conferred with the commander of one of the Russian brigades, replied that, owing to the state of exhaustion of his troops, it was impossible to demand this fresh effort from them so soon. But Sarraill, still conducting the campaign from his office in Salonica, reiterated the order. The date of the attack was adjourned for a few days, then again anticipated, thus imposing a vast amount of work on the Staff to keep up with these various changes. Finally the Franco-Russian attack was launched on October 6th, but it achieved no other result than that of costing the Allies heavy losses, without gaining any ground to speak of. But the surrender of a whole Bulgarian battalion convinced the C.-in-C. that the *moral* of the enemy was very much depressed, and he ordered yet another attack which took place on the 14th. It was no more successful than the previous one, and cost the French 1,500 casualties. General Sarraill then went to General Cordonnier's H.Q., and in the presence of various French and foreign officers of inferior rank, made a violent scene to the Commander of the A.F.O. He declared that it was only the Serbs who had done anything at all, and refused to listen to his excuses. General Dietrich, commanding one of the Russian brigades, wrote a letter protesting against the order of attack addressed to Cordonnier, but intended for Sarraill, and sent a copy of it to the Russian Government.

General Petitti was anxious that the 35th Division should not remain inactive during these operations. In October the Ivrea brigade (161st and 162nd Regiments), commanded by General Beltramo, had arrived, together with a second squadron of the Lucca Cavalry Regiment and some other detachments, which brought our effectives up to over 50,000 men. General Sarraill now asked General Petitti whether he preferred to extend his front to the left, so as to relieve the British, or, making an exception to the principle that the division was not to be split up, to send a brigade to take part in the operations in the Monastir area. For political reasons, i.e. to render our co-operation more effective, and also because he was certain that the arrangements for any extension of his front would be made regardless of the forces actually at his disposal, General Petitti chose the second alternative. Having asked for and obtained the necessary authority from the *Comando Supremo*, he sent the Cagliari Brigade with a squadron of cavalry and some mountain batteries towards Monastir.

It was then possible to realize how appalling was the state of communications in Macedonia. The Salonica-Monastir railway had a very small carrying capacity, and we could only dispose of three trains a day for transport of our troops. The movement began on October 22nd, and the Command had orders to advance from Ekshisu on November 7th, but as the various services had not yet all arrived the march was unable to commence until the 11th. When General Roques, the French Minister of War, came to Macedonia, he spoke of sending out fresh contingents of troops, but General Petitti wisely reminded him that in the present state of the roads these reinforcements would be immobilized and useless.

The task of the Cagliari Brigade was to relieve the left brigade of the 57th French Division and advance along the crest of the Baba range south-west of Monastir, towards Kichevo and Gradeshnitsa. A French column was to advance in a direction parallel to ours, between the crest of the ridge and the plain, while a Franco-Russian



group marched forward across the plain directly towards Monastir. On the right the Serbs were operating in the Kaimakehalan—Cerna loop area. The advance of our troops was extremely hard, as the Cagliari Brigade, besides having to overcome the vigorous resistance of the enemy, had to struggle against the snow blizzards over very broken ground, some 2,000 m. above the sea. The brigade had a front of attack of 12 km., and advanced slowly, gaining ground step by step, amid very deep snow. On the 18th it occupied the Ostretz hill, on the 19th the 63rd Regiment conquered the “tooth” of Velusina and occupied Hill 2209.

In the meanwhile the Serbs had made considerable progress at the extreme right. On October 31st they reached Tepavei in the Cerna loop (our future H.Q.); on November 2nd, Jaratok; on the 5th, Hill 1378, the culminating point of the southern part of the loop. In the centre the Franco-Russian column advanced fighting and broke through the Kenali line. But here the Germans and Bulgarians offered a more stubborn resistance, and on the 14th they repulsed an Allied attack with heavy loss. The fall of Hill 1378 and the Italian advance along the Baba range, however, threatened all the enemy positions round Monastir, which were now no longer tenable. On the 15th the Bulgarians abandoned their lines and soon afterwards evacuated Monastir. On the 19th a platoon of French cavalry entered the town, followed by the rest of the Franco-Russian column.

The Cagliari Brigade and the French at its right were to have pushed on towards the Tzrvena Stena so as to capture the positions north-west of Monastir. In fact, on the 21st the 63rd Regiment, after having overcome the enemy's resistance, captured Bratindol. But the French column lower down, instead of continuing its advance in a parallel direction towards the Tzervena Stena, effected a conversion to the right and entered Monastir where it should never have gone. This obliged the Cagliari Brigade to deviate also towards Monastir, as it could not advance with its right flank as well as its left uncovered. Our troops were disappointed in not



having been able, through no fault of their own, to participate directly in the taking of Monastir, to which they had so greatly contributed, nor to drive the enemy from the positions dominating the town from the north and north-west. Then there came an order from G.H.Q., Salonica, suspending any further advance beyond Monastir, and the French who had occupied some heights 5 km. from the town, advanced no more. This brief respite gave the enemy, who had been in full retreat towards Prilep, fresh courage, and they now returned and re-occupied some important positions on Hill 1248; thence they proceeded to bombard Monastir, which remained under fire until the offensive of September 1918. The bad weather and the complete defeat of the Roumanians induced the Entente Governments to suspend operations in Macedonia.

The Italian troops entered Monastir soon after its occupation, and on that occasion General Petitti, Brigadier-General Desenzani and some other officers and men were wounded by the explosion of a shell near the Italian Consulate, and Major Tamajo, engineer-in-chief of the expeditionary force was killed.

The Serbs continued to advance, fighting from height to height and had even captured Hill 1050, destined to become so famous, but worn out and exhausted as they were with the long-drawn struggle and endless marching, they were unable to withstand the fierce counter-attacks of the enemy and the highest summit was lost. One of their armies was reduced from 30,000 men to 6,000, and they were for the time being incapable of any further effort.

On November 26th General Sarrail called on General Petitti in the hospital at Salonica and informed him that the whole Italian expeditionary force was to be relieved on the Krusha Balkan by the British, and thence transferred to the Monastir area. This transfer gave yet another opportunity for realizing how badly organized was the inter-Allied G.H.Q. The British were sent into our area without the Italian Command having been warned, so that the Italian troops were not yet ready to

leave; the arrangements for the movement of troops were extremely faulty, and the Italian Command and above all the *Intendenza* were over-burdened with work necessary to make good deficiencies for which they were not themselves responsible. The march proved extremely arduous, above all owing to the lack of roads, the destruction of the villages and the floods, which, especially between Sarigöl and Naresh and between Topshin and Vertekop, had been very serious. For weeks our troops never had a dry resting place. Even the horse-drawn cavalry lorries could not proceed, and had to be substituted by the small battalion carts. An English journalist tells the story of a M.T. driver who was seen by his comrades buried up to the neck in mud, and while they were trying to extricate him from his difficulties, he said gaily: "I am all right, I am standing on the roof of my lorry!"

During this period there were fears of an attack by the Greeks, and General Sarrail decided to send some troops to the south to defend the defiles from a possible Greek invasion from Thessaly. He therefore asked General Petitti to send the two brigades of the 35th Division, which had come from the Krusha Balkan, to Verria instead of to Veretekop. General Petitti consented, although the movement promised to be very difficult owing to the state of the roads. The information supplied by G.H.Q. in this connexion proved absolutely erroneous, and orders and counter-orders followed each other in quick succession. Finally, on December 12th, General Sarrail ordered the concentration of the whole division at Negochani, 15 km. east of Monastir, as news had been received of the arrival of a German division at Prilep and an enemy counter-attack was expected. The movement was carried out, and on the 18th Sarrail ordered our troops to relieve the French in the sector due north of Monastir.

General Petitti raised objections to the arrangement proposed. In the first place his troops, who had been on the march since the beginning of the previous month without a break, their services being completely disorganized owing to the confusion reigning at G.H.Q.,

were in absolute need of rest. The Cagliari Brigade in particular was exhausted by the long and difficult march through the snows of Mount Baba. For the defence of Monastir, which was one of the most ticklish sectors of the whole front, at least one brigade was needed as a mobile reserve, but the 35th Division was not in a position to provide it. Further, it was necessary that the question of field and medium calibre artillery to be assigned to our expeditionary force should be settled. "I do not propose," wrote General Petitti to General Sarraill, "to undertake the responsibility of the defence of Monastir unless I am placed in a position to do so with at least a probability of success; I do not intend to sacrifice my troops and the honour of my Army by exposing myself to an almost certain defeat, thus allowing it afterwards to be said that the Italians were unable to hold what the other Allies had conquered." As a matter of fact, he felt sure that General Sarraill would not place at his disposal the means necessary for the defence of Monastir, and he believed that the C.-in-C. merely wished to rid himself of this awkward task by handing it over to us, so as to be able to wash his hands of all responsibility if the enemy succeeded in reconquering the town. The true reason of the objections of the Italian Commander was his want of confidence in the loyalty and military qualities of General Sarraill.

On December 18th Sarraill again called on Petitti at the hospital, and asked him to choose his own sector himself, undertaking to place at his disposal two groups of 75 mm. batteries and the medium calibre artillery which happened to be already in the sector chosen, and to leave the division which the 35th was about to relieve in its immediate rear, unless and until it became necessary to employ it elsewhere owing to exceptional circumstances. Subsequently General Petitti, who was now recovered, went to Florina, and, by agreement with General Leblois, the new Commander of the A.F.O. who had relieved General Cordonnier, he chose the western part of the Cerna loop, from Novak to Makovo as his sector, and this arrangement was approved by General Sarraill. Our



division relieved one and a half French divisions and one Serbian division. As the whole of the 35th Division would now be supported on either side by troops of the A.F.O., Petitti himself proposed that he should be placed tactically under the orders of the Command of the latter. During the month of December the whole expeditionary force was concentrated in its new sector in the Cerna loop (except of course the base units at Salonica and the L.O.C. detachments), and there it remained until September 1918, save for a few slight rectifications of the line.

After the occupation of Monastir, the distribution of the Allied forces was stabilized as follows. From Ersek, where a liaison had been effected with our Albanian force (I shall deal later with the relations between the armies in Macedonia and those in Albania) to the eastern arm of the Cerna, the line was held by the A.F.O. The latter now comprised seven French divisions, viz. the 30th, the 57th, the 76th, the 156th, and the 11th Colonial, the two Russian brigades, the 35th Italian, the 16th and 17th French Colonial Divisions. Of the two Russian brigades which were for a short time in the Cerna loop, one was soon afterwards transferred to the lake of Presba and the other to the east of the Cerna. Later, when they were amalgamated into one division, they were concentrated in the Presba area, where they remained until their final break up. The 16th and 17th Colonial Divisions were on our right in the Cerna loop. Between the Cerna and a point near Nonte there were the three Serbian armies, afterwards reduced to two. The line between Nonte and the Vardar was held by the 122nd French Division, subsequently strengthened by one, later on by two, and finally by three Greek divisions. The A.F.O. was divided into two "*groupements de divisions*" (corresponding to army corps), one between the Cerna and Albania, one in the Cerna loop (comprising the Italian troops); the 122nd Division with the Greek forces afterwards added to it formed the "*1<sup>er</sup> groupement*." Between the Vardar and the mouth of the Struma in the Gulf of Orfano was the British area—the XII Corps (10th, 22nd and 26th



Divisions) from the Vardar to lake Butkova, and the XVI Corps (27th, 28th and 60th Divisions) from Butkova to the sea. There were in addition the 228th Garrison Brigade and two cavalry brigades. The 10th and 60th Divisions and the cavalry brigades were transferred to the Palestine front in the summer of 1917.

The medium and heavy calibre artillery was wholly French and British, and in the A.F.O. all the artillery was French, except for the Italian mountain batteries, to which the Greek ones were afterwards added. A fixed quantity of French field and medium calibre artillery had been assigned to our division, and it was placed under the orders of the Italian artillery commander. Some other medium and heavy artillery, which was under the orders of the Army Command, was from time to time assigned to the Italian sector in varying quantities, according to necessity.

The Allied strengths at the beginning of 1917 were roughly as follows :

	Ration Strength.	Rifles.
French.....	210,000	50,000
British .....	180,000	50,000
Italian .....	55,000	18,000
Serbs .....	152,000	80,000
<hr/>		<hr/>
Total.....	597,000	198,000

I shall subsequently have occasion to mention the variations in these strengths.

This distribution shows how General Sarrail's object was to have French detachments always dovetailed in between troops of other nationalities. Thus the Russians, who were at first divided into two separate groups, were between two French divisions, the 35th Italian Division was also between two French divisions, while French units separated the Italians from the Serbs and the latter from a British and the Greeks. He knew that he did not enjoy sufficient prestige with the other Allies to be able to do what he liked with them, so that he kept French troops scattered about all over the front, and he stated that he acted thus in order to avoid incidents between Allies who did not get on with each other. But

he never succeeded in having the whole of the *Armée d'Orient* under his absolute control, and for every operation undertaken in common or transfers of non-French units, diplomatic negotiations were necessary, in which the interested Governments took part and did not always decide according to Sarraïl's desires. General Leblois commanded the A.F.O. for a short time, and was subsequently relieved by General Grossetti, an excellent officer with whom our Command was always on the best of terms. Unfortunately he became seriously ill, and had to return to France, where he died. General Régnault succeeded him temporarily, and finally General Henrys, who commanded the A.F.O. until the end of the war. With him, too, our Command always got on satisfactorily.

The Allies were faced by the enemy's Army of the Orient, under a German Commander-in-Chief, General von Scholtz, whose G.H.Q. was at Uskub, with a German Staff. In the early part of the campaign, until after the fall of Monastir, the Army comprised several German divisions, 2 Turkish ones and some Austrian battalions. But gradually the German units were withdrawn, except the Staffs of the C.-in-C., of one of the armies, 2 corps and 1 division, some infantry battalions (at first they were about 20, afterwards reduced to 3 or 4), the artillery and some detachments of specialists (air force, engineers, machine gunners, trench-mortar companies, *Flammenwerfer*, etc). The Turkish forces were all withdrawn, except the 177th Infantry Regiment, which remained until the beginning of 1918. Several Austrian battalions remained in the area west of the lake of Ochrida, some of whom took orders from the Macedonian Command, whereas others, although they were facing detachments of the Allied armies in Macedonia, belonged to the Austrian Army in Albania. All the rest of the infantry was Bulgarian, and there was also a considerable amount of Bulgarian artillery.

The area between the lake of Ochrida and the Mala Rupa (east of Nonte) was held by the so-called XI German Army (German, as we have seen, only in name and regards the command, but composed almost entirely of

Bulgarian troops), with its H.Q. at Prilep and commanded by General von Steuben. It comprised two corps, the LXI and LXII German Corps, whose liaison was at the western curve of the Cerna. The LXI consisted of some Austrian battalions, the mixed Bulgarian division, the 4th, 1st, and 6th Bulgarian Divisions. The LXII Corps comprised the 301st German Division consisting of a few German battalions, and several Bulgarian regiments. It occupied the whole of the Cerna loop opposite our division and the two French colonial divisions. Further east were the 2nd and 3rd Bulgarian Divisions. From the Mala Rupa to a point on the Beles range opposite Dova Tepe (east of Lake Doiran) the line was held by the I Bulgarian Army comprising the 5th, 9th and Mountain Divisions. Next, from Dova Tepe to the sea, came the II Bulgarian Army (commanded by General Lukoff), together with elements of the IV Army ; the II comprised the 7th, 8th and 10th Divisions. Along the Aegean coast as far as the river Mesta, the Aegean Coast Defence Group was spread out. The II Army was nominally independent of the German Command, but practically it was, like the whole of the rest of the Bulgarian Army, at the complete disposal of the Germans. The Bulgarian Commander-in-Chief was General Gekoff. The total strength of the enemy on the Orient front varied from 600,000 to 800,000. The number of battalions was slightly inferior to that of the Allies, but the battalions were stronger, and whereas all Allied reinforcements had to be transported by sea, with great difficulties and still greater risks, the enemy's depots were close at hand. Moreover, Germany and Austria were, until the beginning of 1918, ever able to send troops to the Balkans with much greater facility and speed than we could. Even Turkey might have sent reinforcements to Macedonia by rail ; but Germany did not wish to make use of this assistance, because the Bulgarians were jealous of Turkish co-operation in a country like Macedonia, which until a few years ago had formed part of the Ottoman Empire.

The number of the enemy's field and mountain guns

was slightly inferior to that of the Allies, but they were much stronger in medium and heavy calibre guns; they also had a number of guns of greater calibre and range than anything of which we could boast, and they kept their forces on the Macedonian front supplied with their best and most up-to-date material, whereas the Allies neglected theirs.

The enemy defences, which were rudimentary at first, were gradually perfected until they came to constitute a system of really formidable fortifications, especially in the Monastir area, Hill 1050, and the sector west of Lake Doiran. Opposite the Serbian area and in certain other sectors there were fewer artificial defences, but the enemy positions were there, as indeed along almost the whole of the front, infinitely superior to ours. In the Italian sector, as we shall see, the summits of the ridge were all in the hands of the enemy, by whom our lines of access were to a large extent dominated; the same conditions existed opposite the II Serbian Army (Dobropolje-Vetrenik area) and opposite the British, west of Lake Doiran.

It should always be borne in mind that the war in Macedonia, owing to the nature of the country in which the operations took place, the scarcity of railways, roads and resources, the pestilent climate, the sparse population and the great distances which separated us from our centres of supplies, was essentially a colonial campaign. But the Germans, and the Bulgars organized and trained by the Germans, had all the means and materials of modern war at their disposal. During the early days of the expedition the Allied Command was not even provided with staff officers who were well acquainted with modern warfare, and the material means which the armies received from Europe were of inferior quality. The C.A.A. never attributed sufficient weight to these difficulties.



### CHAPTER III

## THE COMMAND OF THE ALLIED ARMIES IN THE ORIENT. THE FRENCH TROOPS.

LET us now see how the Chief Command of the Allied Armies at Salonica was organized. This should have been essentially an inter-Allied Command. But in practice it always remained a French Command, to which some liaison officers were attached representing the other Allied armies. Instead of devoting his attention to operations exclusively, and particularly to those executed by several Allied forces in collaboration, General Sarrail, and to a lesser extent even his successors, was principally occupied with the *Armée française d'Orient*, although the latter had its own Command and Staff. Sarrail moreover attended personally to a number of other matters, such as the police, the Press and postal censorship, trade, archæology etc., which ought not to have required the attention of the Commander-in-Chief, or at least should have been delegated by him to subordinates.

General Sarrail came to Salonica from the French front, where he had commanded the III Army. He had proved himself a gallant soldier, and had distinguished himself at the Marne and at the first battle of Verdun. But he was not a good army commander, nor was he popular at G.H.Q. on account of his intriguing nature. The French Government wished to get rid of him, and, having recalled him from the command of the III Army, contemplated sending him to the East to take command of an expedition which was to have operated in the Dardanelles and in Asia Minor. But when the impossibility of holding the Dardanelles became manifest that scheme was abandoned, and General Sarrail was appointed to

command the troops in Macedonia. He at first did not wish to go, as he regarded that command as inferior to his rank, but he soon saw that the choice lay between Salonica and Limoges, so that he had to accept.

He therefore reached Macedonia under the shadow of failure, and this was the initial reason which prevented him from exercising great authority or personal prestige over the other Allied commanders. His policy of intrigue increased this lack of confidence in him. In a certain passage of his memoirs he makes the characteristic admission that, while he was still in Paris before coming out to take up his duties in the East, M. Millerand, then Minister of War, enjoined on him at their last interview "not to frequent members of Parliament." He was extremely ambitious and had high political aspirations, so that from the beginning of his reign at Salonica we find him deeply involved in diplomatic questions, and he subordinated his whole military activity to political considerations. He never showed himself a really inter-Allied commander; he constantly acted in what he thought were the interests of France, but he understood French interests only in the narrowest and most exclusive sense, not only to the detriment of the interests of the other Allies, but also to that of a common friendly agreement of all the Allies, and consequently even of the real higher interests of his own country. Many of the far more serious disagreements which have subsequently developed between France and her Allies have their remote origins in the bickerings engendered by General Sarraïl's policy in Macedonia.

In appearance he was a handsome, attractive-looking man, of martial bearing, in spite of his white hair, and he was affable with everybody. He affected a slightly exaggerated *bonhomie* which occasionally assumed a somewhat vulgar tone, easily degenerating into coarseness. Nor did he always maintain that dignity which should characterize the bearing of every officer, but particularly of one invested with such important functions. He allowed Captain Mathieu, attached to his Staff (an officer of whom I shall have more to say later) to behave and

adopt a tone towards him at his own mess which scandalized the other French or Allied officers who were present at these unedifying scenes. A freemason, an anti-Clerical, of strong Radical-Socialist sympathies, he had composed his Staff of officers having the same views, many of whom had no other qualifications for their jobs. The great majority of the French officers were anything but enthusiastic towards Sarrail's military and political conduct; they complained of favouritism in the matter of promotions for merit, which were reserved for a small clique of officers in his immediate entourage, and were seldom granted to the real fighters. He rarely visited the front, save on the occasion of ceremonies, conferring of medals, official visits, etc. He prepared his plans of operations in his office at Salonica, where he spent nearly all his time, even during important offensives.

His amorous relations were the subject of a vast amount of gossip. His friendship for a Russian lady of high rank reached such a point that she was allowed to enter his office at G.H.Q. at any moment, even when he himself was not there and confidential documents were spread about his desk. The lady in question was actually suspected of espionage, and apart from this charge, which was probably unfounded, she was also accused of illicit interference in political and military affairs. In this connexion she once said to an Italian officer, some time after Sarrail's departure; "It has been stated that when General Sarrail was here, it was I who commanded the Armée d'Orient. Unfortunately, this was untrue; if I had commanded it, far fewer *bêtises* would have been committed." The greatest surprise caused by General Sarrail was his marriage with a French Red Cross nurse attached to one of the military hospitals in Salonica, in the spring of 1917. The affair caused a considerable scandal, as all Allied officers were forbidden to bring their wives out to Macedonia, whereas Sarrail not only married, but kept his wife with him in Salonica.

The absolute want of confidence of the Allied commanders under his orders in General Sarrail's military qualities, his position became ever more impossible. To command



CHURCH OF ST. GEORGE, SALONICA.

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an army composed of soldiers belonging to five different nationalities, two of them indigenous to the country, each with its own military organization, is at best no easy task, and only a leader endowed with great tact, a conciliatory spirit and a keen respect for the national feelings of others could have done so with success. In a national army the orders of the commander are obeyed without discussion ; but in a force like the *Armée d'Orient* the Allied commanders under General Sarraïl were representatives of their respective G.H.Q.'s and Governments, to whom they could always apply if he gave orders which appeared to them out of place. Sarraïl ever gave the first consideration to the political effect which this or that event would produce, and he often gave orders for an operation simply because he believed that it would make a good impression on the public and on the Press, and consequently on the world of politicians, even if it were of no real military value. It was clear that with such a leader, even if he had had military qualities superior to those which he actually possessed, and if he had had really abundant resources at his disposal, it would have been very difficult to carry out an offensive on a large scale with any likelihood of success. In fact, while the Monastir offensive was only half a success and produced hardly any results, the offensive of May, 1917 was, as we shall see, a complete failure. Sarraïl's only real achievement was the deposition of King Constantine, and that was a political rather than a military enterprise.

A characteristic side of General Sarraïl's activities was his commercial policy. He took a lively interest in the promotion of French economic development in Macedonia, to the detriment, not of enemy interests, which were non-existent, but of those of the other Allies. He had instituted a very well-organized commercial bureau, but it was generally regarded as not quite correct that an inter-Allied Commander should avail himself of his position as such to develop the trade of his own country alone. To attain this object he also made use of the postal censorship, to which he devoted consider-

able attention. By its means he learnt which local merchants sent their orders to France and which to other countries; the latter were not infrequently the objects of thinly veiled threats and persecutions, inflicted with a view to inducing them to alter their ways. Matters reached such a point that the other Governments ended by establishing postal censorships of their own over the correspondence between Salonica and their respective countries.

General Sarrail had numerous conflicts with the Italian Command. I have already mentioned the incidents which occurred in connexion with the Monastir operations and the transfer of the division. But incidents were of almost daily occurrence. One day a movement order concerning our own troops was not communicated to the Italian Command; another time a communiqué from G.Q.G. on some operation in which an Italian detachment had greatly distinguished itself failed to mention the Italians at all. On one occasion the local French or Greek press was allowed or inspired to print articles attacking and libelling Italy, while on another the local Italian paper *La Voce d'Italia* was suspended for having replied in a somewhat violent tone. It might be thought that the Italians were too susceptible on these matters, but incidents of this kind occurred with such frequency in connexion with them that it was impossible to avoid the conclusion that there was considerable animosity on Sarrail's part against them. But above all our Command was convinced that he had no notion of what war in the Balkans really was. In this it was in perfect agreement with the other Allied Commands.

With the other Allies too Sarrail's relations were anything but cordial. He was in constant disagreement with the British, whose commander had succeeded in getting himself invested with the rank of Commander-in-Chief so as to reduce his dependance on Sarrail to a minimum. Even with the Serbs he was not on good terms. They complained that French help had come too late to save their country from disaster, and that the French never forgot to remind them of their debt to France. They did not wish to take

orders in matters of tactics from the C.A.A., both because their army was commanded by the Crown Prince who refused to accept a subordinate position, and because they considered that they knew a good deal more about Balkan warfare than Sarraïl, and in this they were not altogether wrong. They were moreover irritated by the fact that the French communiqués never gave sufficient prominence to the actions of the Serbian troops, so that their G.H.Q. ended by issuing communiqués of its own. Even with the Greeks, to whom, after the Venizelist revolution, he always spoke "honeyed words" in public, he was on the worst of terms, as appears from his memoirs and articles published since the war. The street in Salonica which had been gratefully baptized "Odos Sarraïl" has recently had its name altered.

It can be fairly stated that General Sarraïl stands condemned by his own memoirs more severely than by any outside criticism. The volume is very interesting and well written, but, as a distinguished Italian officer stated, "on a background of undeniable truths, he has woven a tissue of venomous untruths, with which he has sought in vain to justify his action in the Orient." His political intrigues, his conduct towards the Allies, the manner in which he treated many gallant French officers, such as General Cordonnier—to mention one case alone—all this appears in the clearest light in his *Apologia pro vita sua*.

The G.H.Q. of the C.A.A. was of course at Salonica. It was, like other French Army Commands, divided into two main branches—the *État-major de l'Avant* and the *Direction de l'Arrière*. The Chief of the General Staff under General Sarraïl was first Colonel George and then General Michaud. The *Avant* was divided into four bureaux: 1st, effectives and materials; 2nd, information (intelligence); 3rd, operations; 4th, supply and transport. Relations between the liaison officers and the Command and its bureaux were as a rule extremely cordial, and for my own part I shall always have the pleasantest remembrance of them, especially of my connexion with the *Deuxième Bureau*, to which we liaison officers



were for a long time attached; its successive chiefs (these unfortunately were constantly changing) were regular, and usually very distinguished, officers of field rank, and the other members of it were reserve officers, some of them eminent men in different walks of life—university professors, archaeologists, jurists, etc. With the 3rd bureau too, to which we were afterwards attached, I always got on well. But it should be added that with the French Command (advisedly, I call it French, although in theory it was inter-Allied) there was never that same *camaraderie* that there was with the British. With the former we were welcome guests, whereas the latter treated us as brothers and hid nothing from us. Let me quote an instance of this difference with regard to the question of strength returns. It was very important for all the Allies to know each other's respective strengths. We naturally communicated ours to the C.A.A. and the other Commands periodically and in the greatest detail. To learn the French strength required immense labour and ingenuity in collecting, collating and completing the figures; they were communicated to us unwillingly, in an incomplete form and with considerable delay—it was indeed far easier to learn what were the enemy's effectives than those of the French. The British on the other hand placed their statistical returns at our disposal, showing the organic strength, the actual strength, the reinforcements asked for and those known to be on their way out, for each unit and speciality. Nor did the Serbs or Greeks have any objection to communicating their strengths to us. It was generally believed that the reason of this reticence on the part of the French was that, while they maintained the number of their units unchanged, their effective strength was greatly reduced, and that they feared that the Allies, especially the British, might avail themselves of this state of things as a pretext for refusing to recognize France's right to the supreme command of operations in Macedonia. I do not know whether this was the real or only reason, but the fact in itself is undoubted, and it certainly rendered co-operation much more difficult than it ought to have been.



TRANSPORT IN WINTER.



THE ALLIED LIAISON OFFICERS AT G.H.Q., SALONICA.



The services of the Army were carried out partly by the 1st and 4th bureaux of the *Avant*, and partly by the *Direction de l'Arrière*, the latter being for a long time under the sympathetic and jovial General Boucher. The organization was not perfect, and transport and supplies were sometimes faulty. The Italian expeditionary force in particular often suffered from these defects whenever its services had to be supplied by the French, not on account of any ill-will on the part of the latter, but owing to the defects of the system and the imperfect manner in which orders were executed. The French themselves were wont to say that more time was needed for a letter to go from the *Avant* to the *Arrière* than to ask for and obtain instructions from Paris.

Of the 8 French divisions 5 were Metropolitan (i.e. raised in France proper)—the 30th, 57th, 76th, 122nd, and 156th—and 3 Colonial—the 11th, 16th and 17th. At first they were all of 4 regiments of 3 battalions each. But subsequently, owing to the reduction of strengths and also to the general reorganization of the French Army, the Metropolitan divisions were reduced to 3 regiments each, and the brigades (which had been of 2 regiments each) abolished. Each regiment in the colonial divisions comprised 2 white and 1 coloured battalion. The divisions, as we have seen, were formed into groups, corresponding to army corps but of somewhat looser formation, of whom there were at first 2 and afterwards 3, and they also included non-French troops. Special units were from time to time constituted according to necessity for special operations, etc. There was in addition the Cavalry Division, comprising the 1st and 4th Chasseurs d'Afrique and the Morocco Spahis (coloured), commanded by General Jouinot-Gambetta. There were also some units not forming part of any division such as the 2nd bis Zouaves, the Algerian, Annamite, Madagascar, Indo-Chinese *tirailleurs*, the Koritza gendarmerie, etc.

It was generally admitted that the French artillery in Macedonia was excellent. In spite of the defective and seldom renovated material the gunners accomplished



wonders, and although the enemy during the early period of the campaign had a larger number of guns than the Allies, and was supplied to the very end with guns of heavier calibre and greater range, the French batteries held their own admirably. The French artillery officers attached to our force were always on the best of terms with their Italian comrades, and they learned to appreciate each others' fine military qualities.

As regards general education, the French officers were superior to those of any of the other Allied armies. There was hardly one of them who had not a literary, political and historical culture which we should have regarded as above the average, and in this they also ranked above the British; their conversation was nearly always extremely agreeable owing to their high intellectual level, wide range of interests and their keen wit. Their knowledge of foreign languages on the other hand was very slight; regular officers usually knew German, and among the reserve officers one occasionally came across some who for business or other reasons knew foreign languages, but the great majority only understood French. Personally they were generally attractive, had good manners, made a great many compliments and very keenly appreciated any courtesy extended to them. At mess their behaviour was decorous, and they spoke less loudly than their Italian colleagues, many of whom invariably raised their voices to add strength to the arguments they were sustaining. But they had a somewhat exaggerated idea of the absolute superiority of the French over all other nations in everything, and they did not hide it; for this reason they sometimes appeared ungenerous, and succeeded in irritating their foreign colleagues of all the Allied armies. The officers attached to the General Staff seldom made any attempt to disguise their weakness for foreign decorations, and the extremely transparent allusions which they made to the subjects when conversing with liaison officers or others whom they believed to have ribbons galore at their disposal contributed not a little to make the horrors of war quite bearable.

French Staff officers were always under the incubus of the *mot d'ordre*. One day the word would be passed round that optimism was to be the keynote, and then one saw nothing but smiling faces, cheerfulness and confidence in the final victory within a month. Another day the *mot d'ordre* was in a minor key; that meant long faces, black pessimism, *le cafard*, no end to the war in sight, the Germans invincible, peace goodness knows when and at goodness knows what conditions. All this had nothing to do with the actual military events either fortunate or the reverse, but was the result of orders from above. Similarly, their attitude towards the Allies varied from day to day, being warmly cordial at one moment and coldly courteous the next.

But whatever the faults of the French may have been, it must be admitted that in actual combat they were marvellous. Officers and soldiers vied with each other in patriotism and courage. When they were in the front lines no one could fail to admire their dash and gallantry; their battle discipline was magnificent. On the other hand, their discipline at the rear and on the lines of communication left much to be desired, and the behaviour of the soldiers and even of not a few officers at some distance from the front, especially at Salonica, often led to unpleasant incidents. Once they were away from the front these men seemed to forget the respect due to their officers, who seldom dared to reprimand them even for quite serious disciplinary offences. They often behaved riotously, got drunk, appeared with their uniforms in disorder, and it was an unusual sight to see two men dressed alike. A British officer connected with the officers' clothing store told the writer that as long as French officers were forbidden to wear Sam Brown belts he was constantly receiving applications for authority to purchase them (they could not be sold to non-British officers without written authority from the A.Q.M.G.), but as soon as their G.Q.G. issued a circular removing the ban on that article of equipment the applications from the French fell off!

Rioting among French soldiers was by no means

unknown, and encounters were particularly frequent between French and Allied soldiers, whereas other allies seldom had rows among themselves. Even the French camps were less orderly and well-arranged than those of the British or Italian troops. Where French and Italian troops were in direct liaison at the front relations were excellent, and the former often had recourse to the latter's assistance in constructing huts.

But it was enough to see a French unit in fighting kit on the march towards the front lines or returning from them to realize the high military and warlike spirit of the French nation. Patriotic feeling was extremely developed among all. "Defeatist" talk, expressions of sympathy, or complaisant admiration for the enemy, such as were heard among the officers of some other armies, were unknown, and would indeed not have been tolerated for an instant. They might, as I have said, often talk in a pessimistic tone, but anything like sympathy for the enemy was inconceivable. The tradition of ten centuries of splendid military history was not belied.

Of the sectors held by the French two were particularly hard—that of Hill 1248, north of Monastir, and around the city, and the eastern part of the Cerna loop, which presented features similar to those of our own sector. The other French sectors were extremely uncomfortable, as was indeed the whole of the Macedonian front, but less dangerous from a purely military point of view. The Monastir area was exceptionally hard, inasmuch as the town exercised a peculiar fascination over the Bulgars—to them it was the symbol of Macedonia, the Mecca of their Balkan aspirations; indeed almost the only territory not yet occupied by them to which they laid claim, and which they had reasonable hopes of acquiring. They therefore maintained a relentless and vigorous pressure on those lines in the hope of breaking through and achieving not only a strategic victory of considerable importance, but also a highly significant moral and sentimental success. The German Command at one time was anxious to withdraw from the Monastir area altogether, but the opposition of Bulgaria to this

plan for once prevailed. The struggle round the town therefore continued with great violence, and the troops on Hill 1248 had to keep a ceaseless vigil, sustain perpetual attacks or deliver counter-attacks, and were always under the fire of heavy bombardments. Monastir itself suffered severely as it sheltered various staffs, and also many batteries of artillery.

The A.F.O. front was reached by railway to Armenohor (the station for Florina) or Sakulevo, and thence by road and décauville to the first lines, but supply trains at night went almost into Monastir. For the troops west of the Pisoderi pass a "telepherie" line was used for supplies, but it sufficed only for a small part of the necessary materials, and the rest had to be conveyed by lorry or cart. The two divisions in the eastern half of the Cerna loop were supplied by the same routes as those used by the Italians. The H.Q. of the A.F.O. was at Florina, a pleasant little town at the foot of the Pisoderi pass, well watered by many runnels and adorned with trees. The troops of the *Premier groupement* (122nd Division and Greek units) were supplied by the Vardar railway to a certain point, and thence by road.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE BRITISH SALONICA FORCE

THE British Army in Macedonia, officially known as the B.S.F. (British Salonica Force), originally consisted, like the French force, of units transported from the Dardanelles. Later it was reinforced by fresh divisions and became an autonomous army, although always under the superior command of the French C.-in-C. It comprised 2 Army Corps (the XII and the XVI), at first of 3 infantry divisions each (10th, 22nd, 26th, 27th, 28th, and 60th), the 228th Garrison Brigade and 2 cavalry brigades; in the course of 1917, as we have seen, two of these divisions—the 10th and the 60th—and the cavalry brigades were withdrawn and sent to Egypt, so that only four divisions remained, plus the garrison brigade, composed of men not fit for the front line. The artillery was strengthened in 1918 by a fairly large number of 6-in. guns and howitzers. Each division consisted as usual of 3 brigades, and each brigade at first of 4 battalions, but later on, when strengths had fallen very low, they were reduced to three. Each division had its own artillery, cavalry, engineers, and other services, and sometimes even the brigades were so provided, and there were in addition the army corps and army artillery and services, and the air force. The troops and services in the base area and on the lines of communication were under the Base Commandant; later a G.O.C. Lines of Communication was also appointed. As regards effectives, strengths were allowed to fall dangerously low, because the War Office was always somewhat hostile to the Macedonian enterprise—at a certain moment, as we shall see, a proposal

was made that it should be withdrawn into the Salonica entrenched camp. Consequently, reinforcements were sent out grudgingly and in insufficient numbers, while disease and to a lesser extent war losses caused serious inroads into the strength of the B.S.F. During the last phase of the war the battalions rarely had more than 500 men each.

G.H.Q., Salonica, attempted to make good these losses by repeated "combing out," sending to the battalions at the front all the men who could justly be regarded as fit, and reducing the number of British transport drivers, muleteers and soldiers attached to the base and lines-of-communication units to a minimum, and substituting them with Indians, Cypriots and Macedonian natives; a school for these new transport drivers was instituted at Lembet near Salonica and gave good results, while a great deal of useful work was accomplished by native labour battalions; the latter were also employed by other Allied armies, and there was a considerable amount of lively competition among the different forces to secure as large a share as possible of the available supply of native workers.

The British G.H.Q. was, as I have said, at Salonica, and Lieutenant-General Sir George Milne, who relieved General Mahon, was appointed Commander-in-Chief. He took orders from the C.A.A. only in the case of joint operations, and as long as General Sarrail was in Macedonia General Milne was his subordinate only in name, as he refused to tolerate any interference on the part of the former in whom he had no confidence, and whom he always suspected of political intrigue. General Sarrail on his part disliked General Milne, so that combined operations were practically impossible. General Milne was a man of uncommon intelligence, with extremely shrewd powers of observation and insight, and, unlike Sarrail, he was exclusively a soldier and did not take any interest in political matters. Our relations with him were always of the most cordial character. For General Mombelli he had a special regard, which was thoroughly reciprocated by the Italian Commander. He was a fine-looking man,

a great lover of sport, a hard worker, a gentleman in every sense of the word; and he had a keen dislike for the atmosphere of Salonica as a hotbed of mean political and personal *potins* and petty jealousies. He resided a great part of the year at Guvesne, some 24 km. from Salonica, where he had established his advanced G.H.Q., equally handy for reaching either of his two Corps H.Q.'s. While staying at Guvesne he usually motored into Salonica every morning, except when he went out to the Corps H.Q. of the front lines.

I knew his three successive Chiefs of the Staff—General Gilman, a singularly attractive personality, with whom our relations were more than cordial, especially in the dark days of the spring of 1917, when after the collapse of Russia it was felt to be particularly important that the armies of the only two Monarchies left among the great Powers of the Entente should keep on the terms of the closest friendship. He said to me when I called to bid him farewell on his departure for Mesopotamia: "Our two Armies out here have always been on such friendly terms that I can see no reason why this state of things should not continue under my successor." General Cory, in fact (a Canadian by birth), followed on General Gilman's footsteps, and when he left to take command of the 27th Division, General Duncan, who was appointed M.G.G.S. in his place, showed himself if possible even more cordial; he is now British Military Attaché in Rome. The Intelligence and Operations branches were in charge of lieutenant-colonels, assisted by numerous distinguished officers, many of whom were reserve or temporary officers, especially those in "I," chosen for their knowledge of the country and the local languages. In both branches I was always received in the most friendly manner, and kept informed of everything of interest, even of extremely confidential matters, strengths, details concerning unsuccessful actions, etc.

In dealing with the British one had, in a word, the sensation that one was among real Allies. And this does not only refer to the General Staff, but also to all the other branches and the commands of units at the

front. The Quartermaster-General's branch (Q), corresponding roughly to our *Intendenza*, was organized on essentially business lines, with all the methods in use in business houses; many of the officers attached to those services were in fact business men in private life. Archæologists were found particularly useful in "I" work, because their training rendered them thoroughly capable of weighing, sifting, and co-ordinating evidence, and deducing accurate or at least reasonable conclusions. If a larger proportion of men of this stamp had been employed in these services, not only in the British, but also in other armies, a great many unfortunate and sometimes disastrous mistakes would have been avoided. Unluckily, however, a number of Staff officers seemed to have no other qualification for their work than an extensive knowledge of the novels of William Le Queux and Phillips Oppenheim, or the adventures of Arsène Lupin, whose situations they attempted to realize in practice. At the head of the Q branch was the Deputy Quartermaster-General, of whom I knew two; the first was Major-General Travers-Clarke, afterwards Q.M.G. in France, the second and last Major-General Rycroft, both of them very capable officers and organizers. With the Adjutant-General's branch, which dealt with personnel, I came less frequently into contact. There were also many offices and special services, among which that of the Military Secretary, whose duties comprised such matters as the promotion of officers, decorations, official visits and dinners and *protocol* generally; for a long time this position was held by the brilliant and agreeable Major Dudley-Carleton.

The British War Office made a point of selecting the officers for the B.S.F. with peculiar care, especially those destined for Staff appointments. As they would naturally come into frequent contact with foreign officers, it was considered very important not to send any officer to Macedonia who was not a thorough gentleman, so as to avoid unpleasant incidents; officers were chosen for these services not only for their technical ability, but also and above all for their high moral character and good manners, points to which insufficient importance



was attached in some other armies. I cannot say that I ever came across a man of the "T.G." type in any responsible post. British officers never caused scandals or provoked inter-Allied incidents, and cases of financial shortcomings were extremely rare and severely punished as soon as they were discovered. In the conduct of operations they showed, if not genius—in this the French were very superior—considerable efficiency and a thoroughly practical spirit. The most complicated transactions were carried out with the utmost simplicity—a couple of telephone calls, the sending of two or three "chits" (usually written in pencil), and the thing was done. In my position as liaison officer I had wide experience of the practical character of British military methods. We were constantly in need of assistance from the Allies for many of our services, especially in the matter of transport, because our expeditionary force was in certain respects incomplete, and according to the terms of the previous agreements, it was the C.A.A. that was bound to supply the deficiencies. The British were therefore under no obligation to assist us. But when we applied to the French we were bandied about from pillar to post before arriving at some useful result; very often we obtained nothing at all, or if we did obtain what we required we had first to overcome innumerable obstacles and refusals. The British on the contrary did everything in their power to satisfy our requests, and when they refused it was because the thing was really impossible, so that it was useless to go back on the matter. What was particularly agreeable about the British was their manner of rendering services as though it were the most natural thing in the world. I remember how on one occasion, I had to make an urgent application to the British G.H.Q. for some fifty motor ambulances to transport a large number of Italian wounded from the station to the hospitals after the action of May 1917; although I had received no instructions on the subject until late in the evening and some of the British officers responsible for that service had gone to bed, the whole matter was arranged without the slightest difficulty,

and the next morning the motor ambulances were ready at the station punctual to the minute. I afterwards went to thank the A.Q.M.G. on behalf of our Command, and all that he replied was : " We've got to win the war together."

Another instance of the admirable organization of the British services occurred during the great fire at Salonica. When the conflagration began to approach the port, the building containing the British Army telephone exchange was menaced, and in fact it caught fire soon after ; in less than an hour the exchange was transferred to a place of safety, and at once began to function regularly.

British officers not only had a very high sense of duty, but some of them seemed to have an almost fanatical attachment to their particular job, which occasionally had its amusing side. One very distinguished officer, whose duties were connected with the topographical section, looked at every event on the Macedonian or other fronts exclusively from the point of view of map-making. His only comment on the deposition of King Constantine and the return of Venizelos to Athens was that he trusted that it would now be possible for him to obtain certain maps of Thessaly which the Royalist Staff had hitherto refused to give him. During the gloomy days of the great German push in March 1918, what he chiefly deplored was the probable capture by the enemy of the topographical plant and depot at the V Army H.Q. in Albert. After the collapse of Bulgaria in September following, he regretted that the end had come so soon because there was a certain sector of the British front which he had not quite finished mapping, and now he would be unable to complete the work ; not to mention the fact that all the beautiful maps which he had prepared with so much care were now mere wastepaper !

In the British Army differences between the various arms and services seemed to be less marked than in others, but the *esprit de corps* among officers and men of the same regiment was extremely strong, even though a regiment was not an effective unit. What appeared to many officers of other Allied armies as a most excellent

institution was that of temporary rank. The fact that an officer entrusted with duties pertaining to a higher rank than his own, on account of his peculiar fitness for the position, could be temporarily promoted to that higher rank, even though for administrative reasons it was not possible to give him the effective rank, was very useful and presented many advantages. With us, subalterns who in civil life held important positions, in the army were either detailed for duties far below their real capabilities and were thus wasted, or if they were entrusted with more responsible duties, they retained their modest military rank and often came into conflict with superior officers of the regular army who were jealous of them. As a liaison officer, although only a lieutenant, I seldom did any business with foreign officers below the rank of major, and usually dealt in generals, but as I represented a foreign army I was treated practically as an equal, which of course was not the case when I had to do with Italian officers of superior rank.

There was a very strong sense of equality between officers of different rank when off duty—at mess, in sport, etc. Officers belonging to the same mess never waited for each other when dinner was announced, whatever the rank of the absent colleague might be, nor were inferiors expected to salute their superiors at mess or at the clubs, even in the case of a general. This custom sometimes caused offence to certain Italian generals or field officers, who could not understand why they were not saluted by British subalterns whom they met at a restaurant or club; it was of course not due to lack of deference on the part of the latter, but to that tendency to exclude all feeling of *malaise* between inferiors and superiors when off duty. The one real distinction between categories of officers in the British Army was that existing between those attached to the Staff and those who were not. The feelings of the latter, especially of regimental officers, towards the former were sometimes rather bitter, as indeed has been the case in all armies from the days of the *Iliad* downward;

in our own army the distinction was particularly marked. In the B.S.F., as I suppose in other British armies, the Staff officer considered himself superior intellectually to the average regimental or A.S.C. officer—and he generally was—while the latter had a certain contempt not unmixed with envy for the red-tabbed super-man enjoying the privileges and comforts of G.H.Q., and proximity to that magnificent divinity the C.-in-C., or even of such minor divinities as corps or divisional commanders, and avoiding the dangers of life in the front lines. “We run all the risks and do all the really hard work, whereas they get all the plums,” expresses the general attitude. But the conflict is inevitable and universal, and should not be taken too seriously, the more so as the majority of staff officers had usually been through the mill of trench warfare themselves, and often had been given staff appointments only after having been badly wounded. If anything, in the British Army the feeling against supposed *embusqués* was less virulent than in others.

The discipline of the British troops in the East was really admirable, and was all the more remarkable inasmuch as a very large part of the army was improvised; the men, however, had acquired a military bearing equal to that of their professional comrades, but without a trace of that militarism which made the Prussian so justly disliked. If at the front the British Tommy was a first-class fighting man, his discipline was equally well maintained at the base or along the lines of communication. His personal cleanliness was remarkable, and so was that of his kit and quarters. At Salonica drunkenness was by no means uncommon, even among officers, especially those who had come down from the trenches on a few days’ leave, but it seldom led to violence and riotousness, and the much-dreaded A.P.M. was apt to come down with a heavy hand on delinquents. British road discipline was also excellent, and blocks seldom occurred even along the most frequented roads and in moments of exceptionally heavy traffic. What greatly impressed the local population, accustomed through



centuries to the passage of native or foreign armies, was the fact that this was the first war in which, as regards the British area, women could move about the country freely, without fear of being molested. This applied also to the smaller Italian area, but not always to those of all the other Allied armies.

The British military authorities took special care of the well-being of the troops, which was particularly important in the case of armies like the B.S.F. operating at a great distance from home and deprived of all the amenities which made life on other fronts more tolerable. Not only were all possible measures for safeguarding the health of the men rigorously applied, but nothing was neglected that could contribute to keep up their *moral*. Great importance was rightly attached to every form of sport. Wherever a British detachment was stationed, football and cricket fields and tennis courts were provided, and even the newly invented game of handball was introduced. Gymnastic competitions of all kinds, boxing matches and horse races were organized. Horse-shows were held on a large scale, and it was very interesting for foreign officers to attend them, not merely for the shows themselves—although these were usually attractive spectacles—but because they enabled them to see how admirably the British kept their horses and mules, in spite of the enormous difficulties of supply and the terrible scarcity of forage. Horses of the very first class were rare, but the average level was extremely high, and one never saw lean or ill-groomed animals. At the horse-shows there were competitions for troop horses, artillery and transport teams, and points were also based on the state of the harness; if the brass was not properly polished several points would be lost. Above all, the mules were magnificent, and if, as a British remount officer said to me, the prices paid for them were likewise magnificent, the services they rendered were invaluable. Even when the greater part of the British Tommies had been withdrawn from those services and substituted with Indians, Cypriots or Macedonians, British officers and N.C.O.'s succeeded in getting their animals almost as carefully



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groomed as before. When General Lukoff, Commander of the II Bulgarian Army, came to Salonica to negotiate the armistice, he was enormously impressed with the British mules, and he said that if he had had such transport animals his army would by that time have been at Athens.

The various sporting events were not only held in Salonica or in other parts of the base area, but also in the vicinity of the front lines, at a few kilometres from the trenches. They were occasions for large gatherings of officers, soldiers and nurses, and proved a most valuable means for alleviating the monotony of life in Macedonia and eliminating the *cafard*. Anyone who attended these entertainments felt, if only for a few hours, that he had returned to civilian and civilized life and to home habits, and the preparations for them aroused great interest and distracted men's thoughts from the discomforts and dangers of the campaign, while the physical exercise that they involved had an excellent effect on the health of all those who took part in the matches, and these were very numerous. Officers of all arms, and not merely those of the mounted services, took part in races and horse-shows; I have been present at jumping competitions in which army chaplains and even naval officers took part with distinction. The British school of horsemanship is not so perfect and artistic as the Italian or French schools, and few British officers have the same wonderful mastery of the art as some of their Italian or French colleagues. But there is a far larger number of officers who ride well than in either of the other two armies, as that form of sport is far more widespread.

It had been noticed that the enemy hardly ever opened fire or dropped bombs on these large sports gatherings, which appeared to offer ideal targets, and certain fields near the front lines, which were sometimes used as exercise grounds and sometimes for football or other matches, were constantly fired at in the first instance, but never in the latter. This suggested that brother Bulgar had certain sporting instincts, which enhanced the respect which the British Tommy had for him. After the Armistice,



however, it was discovered that the real reason for the immunity which sports enjoyed was somewhat different. Orders were discovered among the enemy's papers that no form of sport was to be interfered with because the big matches and horse-shows always involved the sending of many telephone messages as to the movement of details of the various units from their regular quarters to the scene of the event; the enemy listening posts were often able to intercept them and thus gather valuable information as to the distribution of British troops. Thus was another pretty war legend knocked on the head.

Another aspect of British military life in Macedonia was the soldiers' theatres. They were not instituted until the second year of the campaign, and at first encountered a good deal of opposition on the part of the recognized officers of the old school. But gradually all opposition was overcome, and the theatre became a recognized institution. Each army corps, each division and many smaller units had their own theatres. Officers attached to the postal censorship assured me that these performances produced extraordinarily good results, as appeared from the soldiers' letters, the general tone of which showed a marked improvement since the introduction of the theatres. "These entertainments," a British Staff officer told me, "are equivalent to an increase of several battalions." Officers and soldiers who took part in them were usually exempted from all other duties while the rehearsals and performances lasted, and no one dreamt of talking about *embusqués* in this connexion because everyone appreciated the importance of this form of activity. Soldiers' theatres were also introduced into other armies, including our own, but the chief feature of the British system was the fact that the performances were acted exclusively by officers and soldiers, usually belonging to the same units as the bulk of the audience. This interested and amused the men far more than a more ambitious performance, even if acted by professional artists of the first rank. The writer was so much impressed by the British soldiers' theatres

that he sent a detailed report about them to the Italian Commander; the report was forwarded to the *Comando Supremo*, and as a result General Mombelli was authorized to introduce theatrical performances into the 35th Division. They proved a great success.

I assisted at several of these entertainments, which were all admirably acted and elaborately staged. On one occasion I witnessed a first-rate performance of the "Chocolate Soldier"—quite a *pièce de circonstance*, as the scene is laid in Bulgaria during the Serbo-Bulgarian war of 1885—at the theatre of the 22nd Division at Rates, only 5 km. from the front lines; and on another a variety entertainment at the XII Corps theatre at Janes, especially built by the Y.M.C.A.; the tenor of the troupe had been detailed for a bombing expedition that very night, but as he was the best artist available he was let off duty when it was known that the Italian liaison officer at G.H.Q. was to be present! I was much flattered.

At Salonica there were comparatively few British troops. There were of course a great many officers at G.H.Q. with their orderlies, clerks, batmen, guards, etc, and the magazines, depots and hospitals required a numerous personnel. Along the Monastir and Lambet roads these vast stores and dumps extended mile upon mile. Immense engineer parks, mountains of packing-cases, clothing stores without end, remount squadrons, veterinary hospitals etc., occupied huge areas; on the other side of the town, on the hill of Kalamaria and towards the bay of Mikra there was a whole city of hospitals in huts or tents, and close by a colossal M.T. heavy repair workshop. The other armies in Macedonia also had enormous supply depots and establishments of all kinds, but those of the British struck one as being on the most imposing scale, erected regardless of cost or labour; this system may have its drawbacks, as the British tax-payer has discovered, but it certainly did contribute to efficiency, and if it was also designed to impress Allies and natives with the might and wealth of the British Empire it achieved its purpose. The hospitals were magnificent; they increased considerably

in numbers during the last two years of the war, because the Q branch was anxious to free the largest possible number of ships from hospital service and the transport of the wounded and sick. During the early days of the campaign serious cases were sent to Malta or Alexandria. But it was found that malaria and dysentery patients recovered very slowly in those places, and many succumbed; at the same time their transport monopolized a large number of ships at a moment when the ravages of submarine warfare made it necessary that the largest possible amount of tonnage should be available for the transport of troops and supplies. Consequently General Rycroft, on assuming the duties of D.Q.M.G. thought that it would be better to increase the hospitals at Salonica and in the neighbourhood, and the convalescent hospitals on Mount Hortiach, where the air is excellent, and evacuate only the most serious cases requiring a very long period in hospital. Thus the transport of the sick was much reduced and the patients benefited by the new system. But in spite of the great care which the British Command devoted to the sick, malarial cases were extremely numerous. In the summer of 1916 there were 11,500 beds in the British hospitals at Salonica, and some 30,000 malarial cases admitted. These figures increased during the succeeding summers, because, in addition to the new cases, there were the relapses of the preceding years. Thus in 1917 malarial cases rose to 63,000, and in 1918, when the total strength was much reduced, to 67,000. Early in 1918 the so-called "Y" system was introduced, whereby chronic malarial cases were sent home.

To reach the British front there were two main arteries—the Janesh road and the Serres road. Both had existed before the war, but were then in such an appalling state of neglect as to be in places almost impassable, and full of holes throughout their entire length; they were indeed little better than tracks, save for a few kilometres here and there. The British military authorities had had practically to rebuild them, and they made them into really magnificent thoroughfares. Their construction and maintenance required armies of native

labourers and cost vast sums. But the expenditure was in a sense an economy, because it spared the wear and tear of the lorries, the renewal of which would not only have cost far more if the roads had been neglected, but they would have been difficult to replace owing to the scarcity of tonnage and submarine risks. These roads and the others built by the French and the Italians, were a magnificent legacy left to Greece and Serbia, but a few weeks of Balkan régime, after the greater Allies had handed them over, sufficed to reduce them to their original state of hopeless dilapidation and ruin once more.

Transport to the XII Corps area was effected by means of the Constantinople railway as far as Sarigöl or Kilindir (goods were conveyed by rail as far as lake Doiran), and thence by the various décauville and the network of ordinary roads to the infantry and artillery positions. Beyond Janesh the country opens out into a wide plateau, somewhat undulated, surrounded by mountain ranges; those to the east and west are fairly high, while immediately to the north they appear insignificant, but in reality constitute formidable defences. As occurred almost invariably on all the mountain fronts in the war, from the Stelvio to the Struma, the enemy held all the higher and stronger positions, dominating those of the Allies. Immediately to the west of Lake Doiran rises the terrible group of the Grand and Petit Couronnés<sup>1</sup> and the "P" ridges, which cost so much blood to the British troops in their heroic efforts in 1917 and 1918. The "P" ridges spread out in a succession of hills—P1, P2, P3, P4, P4 $\frac{1}{4}$ , P4 $\frac{1}{2}$ , P5—west of the Grand Couronné, forming with it an obtuse angle; the "P" ridges dominated all the approaches to the Grand Couronné and the latter those to the former. The Grand Couronné, which I visited immediately after it had been evacuated by the enemy, was formidably defended by the most perfect system of fortifications known to modern military art; the dug-outs and O.P.'s were cut out of the living rock, and often the sides and roof were several metres thick in solid stone. A huge

<sup>1</sup> These names had been given to the positions by the French troops who were first in this area, from supposed resemblance to places in France.



white splash near the summit, visible for many miles in all directions, proved on inspection to be due to the tremendous but useless bombardment of the British artillery.

It was on this sector that the enemy first tried his famous Gotha aeroplanes on the Balkan front—it was, I believe, the first time that they were used at all in the war, and then they were more formidable than any machine possessed by the Allies. The officer in charge of the O.P. who first noticed them, telephoned at once to the XII Corps H.Q. that a new type of aeroplane had appeared above the lines; he was immediately asked in a sceptical tone on what evidence he based his assertion that they were of a new type, to which he replied: “In about five minutes you will find out yourselves from personal experience.” In fact immediately afterwards the Gothas were bombing Janesh for all they were worth.

On this sector the Allied and enemy lines were often quite close to each other as on the French and Italian fronts. East of Lake Doiran there was a wide gap between the two lines, formed by a valley running from that lake to Butkova. The main line of resistance extended along the Krusha Balkan range south of the valley, but there were advanced positions further down, such as the fort of Dova Tepe.

Between the eastern end of the lake and the western spur of the Beles is a broad gap, and there many British officers believed that a break through might be effected, although it was dominated by the batteries on the Beles. But no attempt was made here, save an attack during the last operations in September 1918, and even then it proved abortive and was soon abandoned.

The XVI Corps area was reached by the great Serres road, some 70 km. in length from Salonica to the Struma. For the first 25 km., as far as Guvesne, transport could also be effected by means of a normal-gauge railway built by the British during the war; at railhead there was a M.T. park, whence innumerable lorries conveyed men and supplies to the Struma. Various *décauvilles* spread out from the end of the road towards the front lines. The road climbed over several steep ranges of

hills and plunged down into deep gullies, for the mountain chains in this part of the country all run parallel to the Struma. The Corps H.Q. was at Sivri in summer, a charmingly situated village just below the last range of hills before the drop into the Struma valley; in winter it moved down to a spot nearer the main road. The positions of chief resistance were along this ridge in parallel lines, but there were also a series of important bridge-heads along the river. Beyond the river there were two or three lines of villages, some of them quite large, others merely *chifliks* or farms, abandoned by the inhabitants and partly in ruins. Sometimes the first and even the second lines would be held by the British, while the Bulgars held others further away, along the foot of the mountains behind Serres. But in the summer of 1917, owing to the great heat and the ravages of malaria, the villages beyond the Struma were evacuated by the British, and the bridge-heads held with only an indispensable minimum of troops, while the defence of the spaces between the bridge-heads was entrusted to the river itself, which is difficult to wade, and to the cross-fire of the ports defending the bridge-heads; in any case, in order to attempt the passage of the Struma the enemy would have had to traverse a broad tract of open country before reaching its banks, exposed to the fire of the British batteries hidden amid the dense vegetation or in the crevices of the hills to the west of the right bank. In order to maintain contact with the enemy the British made frequent raids with infantry and cavalry patrols into the villages occupied by isolated detachments of Bulgars; the Bulgarian patrols and outposts did not show much fighting spirit and usually retired precipitously. Sometimes the British patrols penetrated into positions held by permanent enemy garrisons. The most important and successful of these raids was that on Homondos in the autumn of 1917, where many prisoners and some machine guns were captured, as well as a voluminous official correspondence, whence valuable information was acquired, especially concerning the enemy's *moral*, which appeared at that time to be considerably shaken.

On the whole this was a quieter front than that of the XII Corps, as there were no positions corresponding to those of the Couronnés and the "P" ridge, and a no-man's-land some 12 km. wide separated the two armies. For this reason it was deemed possible to hand it over to the Greeks to hold when the rest of the Allied troops were being concentrated elsewhere for attacks on a large scale.

The houses of Serres and Demir Hissar are easily visible to the naked eye, and beyond the latter town I had pointed out to me from an O.P. on a ruined belfry well beyond the river a large white slab on the mountain side, and I was told that in 1913, after their victories over the Bulgars, the Greeks had engraved on it an inscription in honour of King Constantine (then still Diadoch) "Bulgaroctonos," or slayer of the Bulgarians, thus reviving the title of a famous Byzantine Emperor! The Bulgarians I imagine must have erased it, perhaps with the approval of him in whose honour it had been engraved.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SERBIANS

Of all the peoples who participated in the Great War the fate of the Serbs represent the most tragic. Our subsequent disagreements with the Yugo-Slavs should not make us forget the heroic part played by the Serbians even though unfortunately they have forgotten the immense benefits which we conferred upon them. It is the merit of the Italians if the miserable remnants of the Serbian Army, after the disastrous retreat through Albania, were saved from death by starvation, together with thousands and thousands of Serbian civilians, who found a refuge and a warm welcome in Italy, when their country was overrun by the enemy. Let us hope that in the not too distant future the Serbs will remember these facts, and also remember the many Italians who died on Serbian soil fighting for the liberation of Serbia.

After the retreat through Albania the Serbian Army found itself in the most appalling condition. Before the third enemy invasion it comprised some 400,000 men, with 70,000 horses and 65,000 oxen (the mechanical transport service was extremely limited). By the time it reached the Adriatic it was reduced by hunger, cold and sickness, as well as by fighting, to barely 150,000 men, 40,000 horses and 10,000 oxen. Part of the army marched towards Scutari and Alessio and the rest towards Durazzo. The second group was accompanied by several thousand civilian refugees, and also by old King Peter, who was seriously ill, and the Prince Regent Alexander, who was ill, too, for a part of the time. As regards armament, equipment and food, everything was lacking. The



soldiers had been living for many months on 200 to 300 grammes of biscuit every five days.

The work of the Italian Navy in saving the Serbians has often been ignored. The Serbians appear to have forgotten or altogether denied it, as have also some of their foreign apologists. It may therefore be of interest to repeat what Admiral Sechi, the Italian Minister of Marine, said in the Senate on July 19, 1920 in this connexion. After reminding his hearers that the transport of the remnants of the Serbian Army with their supplies, from the ports of Northern Albania, where they had arrived exhausted and famished, to Valona, was the work of the Italian Navy, it was, he said, one of the Allied Governments that, at the end of October 1915 requested the Italian Government to provide for these necessities, and "in spite of the almost insuperable difficulties of the operation, especially on account of the insidious enemy attacks, and the almost total lack of any landing facilities in the places of disembarkation, the Italian Navy granted the request and the transport was carried out successfully and without interruption." It was the Italian Navy which provided the transport of supplies for the Serbian Army (about 28,000 tons). In all about 245,000 Serbian soldiers, 25,000 Austrian prisoners whom they brought with them, over 10,000 animals, and a great deal of material, was thus transported. In spite of the ever-present danger of enemy submarines, in all this vast movement not a single ship was lost, nor did a single Serbian soldier die.<sup>1</sup> But we did not only provide transport and food for these most unfortunate warriors and civilians. Our military and naval medical officers worked admirably for the assistance of the Serbians, saving thousands from death by hunger, exhaustion and infection, as typhus and cholera were raging among the Serbians. An English writer has described in eloquent language this work in a book on the Italian Navy. "Day and night," writes Archibald Hurd, "caring nothing for the risk of infection, striving with all weapons of modern research to prevent this plague spot from infecting half a continent, the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in the *Corriere della Sera*, July 20, 1920.

naval and military doctors, with their sailor and soldier orderlies, fed, tended, bandaged, and with hands soft as women's nursed these poor spectres of fellow creatures."<sup>1</sup> On December 17 it was decided to send the Serbs to Corfu. They were now reduced to 100,000 men with 54,000 rifles 160 machine guns, and 70 guns. When they were transported to Valona King Peter also went to Corfu and embarked on the Italian torpedo boat destroyer, *G. C. Abba*. He wished to receive the salute of the officers of the ship thanking them with generous words for all they had done and the dangers they had faced on their mission of charity. Reminding them of Garibaldi, their own national hero—to many of them already, perhaps, almost a legendary figure—he told them that he had himself twice met that famous soldier. Recalling to them the dark pages of their own national history, with its eventual triumph, he suggested to them that possibly Serbia might be the Piedmont of all the Serbians, and even in this, its blackest hour, the forerunner of an undreamed of and triumphant unity.<sup>2</sup> The Austrian prisoners were re-embarked for Italy and interned in Sardinia, but many of them died of cholera during the voyage. It may be added that while the most generous material assistance was lavished on the Serbians by our Command, as well as by our officers and men, the moral treatment accorded them by one or two of our officers left something to be desired. Although this does not in any way justify the ingratitude which the Serbs have subsequently shown towards Italy, it may serve in part to explain it. Even a cruel phrase or a lack of consideration for anyone who has suffered so terribly are enough to cancel the memory of the great benefits received. As we shall see, Generals Petitti and Mombelli did everything in their power to make the Serbians forget these unfortunate incidents, and they succeeded, at least for the time being.

The bulk of the Serbian troops were concentrated at Corfu, save a small number at Bizerta. The first convoy

<sup>1</sup> Archibald Hurd: *Italian Sea Power in the Great War* (Constable, 1918), p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Hurd, *ibid*,

embarked on January 6, 1916 and during the winter the Allies, especially the British and the French, set to work to re-equip and reorganize the army, and it must be said the soldiers were greatly desirous of going to Salonica as soon as possible to take part once more in the struggle against the invader, although at that time to hope for success seemed madness. The Serbian Government and Parliament also established themselves at Corfu, where they remained until after the Armistice. The reorganization of the army was carried out fairly quickly, and about the middle of April the first detachments began to arrive at Salonica; to these were added the troops who escaped from Monastir or down the Vardar Valley. Throughout the second half of 1916 and the winter of 1916-17 the Serbians continued to arrive, and in May 1917 the army was complete. But the Serbs did not wait until then to begin fighting, because, as we have seen, they took a very prominent part in the operations of the summer and autumn of 1916. As each detachment reached Salonica it was first concentrated in the Serbian camp at Mikra near the city, and then sent towards the front, and its training in modern war methods was completed in Macedonia.

The reorganized Serbian Army then comprised about 150,000 men, divided, as we have seen, into 3 armies of 2 divisions each. Each division comprised 3 regiments of 3 battalions each. As regards armament they were fairly well equipped, and the number of rifles<sup>1</sup> was higher than in the other armies in Macedonia because they had very few transport or lines-of-communication troops. The Allies to a very great extent supplied them with these services.

The Crown Prince Alexander, nominally Commander-in-Chief, kept his modest Court at Salonica, but he spent a good part of the year at the Serbian front with the soldiers, with whom he was very popular. King Peter also resided habitually at Salonica, where he led

<sup>1</sup> By rifles I mean soldiers who habitually use their rifles, viz. the infantry, excluding machine-gunners, men attached to the transport service, etc., who are also armed with rifles.



GENERAL MOMLELLI INAUGURATING A SCHOOL FOR SERB CHILDREN BUILT BY ITALIAN SOLDIERS AT BROD.



ITALIAN BRIDGE OVER THE CERNA AT BROD.





an extremely retired life an account of his illness, and he saw hardly anyone. The military household of the Prince was composed for the most part of field officers who had been seriously wounded, and as Minister of the Royal Household he afterwards appointed M. Balugich, who was considered to be one of the shrewdest diplomats in the Balkans. The various foreign Governments had their representatives at Corfu, as the Serbian Foreign Office was there, but the Prince Regent wished to have a small diplomatic corps attached to his own person. The British and French Governments acceded to this wish immediately, the former sending Admiral Troubridge and the latter Commander Picot as honorary A.D.C.'s. Later on he also wished to have an Italian officer, in the person of Colonel Bodrero, formerly Commander of the Italian troops in Salonica and afterwards in Valona, and the request was finally granted. Admiral Troubridge, an attractive type of naval officer, had been Commander of the squadron which had pursued the *Goeben* and *Breslau* at the beginning of the war, and had afterwards commanded the British naval batteries on the Danube. After the Serbian *débâcle* he followed the remnants of the army to Corfu, and it was on that occasion that Prince Alexander got to know and appreciate him. Admiral Troubridge had great affection for Italy, whose language and literature he knew extremely well, and he liked to be in the company of Italian officers whom he often invited to his house, and in turn, he often went to their mess. He did his best to maintain friendly relations between Serbians and Italians, and gave excellent advice to Prince Alexander.

The actual Commander-in-Chief of the Serbian Army was the Chief of the General Staff, General Boyovich, and the armies, afterwards reduced to two, were commanded by the Voivods Michich and Stepanovich.

In the spring of 1916, Voivod Michich, Commander of the I Army, was appointed Chief of the General Staff in the place of General Boyovich, who took command of the said army in his place. The change was made on the eve of the general offensive, because the plan

of operation was to a large extent the work of Michich himself. Although General Boyovich was an excellent soldier and had always greatly distinguished himself, Voivod Michich was a man of genius, one of the ablest leaders that the Balkans has ever produced. Personally he was a very sympathetic figure, jovial, always serene and good-tempered, even in the most tragic moments, and always certain of final victory. The soldiers had such great confidence in him that during the long period in which illness kept him in hospital, they used to say : " We shall never be able to return to our country if we have not Michich to lead us to victory." He never ceased to show cordiality towards Italy, and even after the Armistice, in spite of the infatuation of hatred against Italy with which the Serbian people had been filled, probably as a result of a propaganda conducted by persons interested in sowing dissension, his feelings towards us never changed, and if one day Italo-Serbian relations improve, it will certainly be due in part to the work of the gallant Voivod. His death, which occurred a short time ago, is a real loss from every point of view.

In a general way the Serbians in Salonica conducted themselves modestly, as was but becoming in their condition of exiles living on charity—I use the word without any intention of offence. In this connexion they offered a notable contrast to the Russian officers after the Bolshevik revolution. Even their Commands and offices were very simple, and their leaders were singularly free from bureaucratic formalities,

The Serbs were supplied by the British and French, but even the material supplied by the former reached them through the French *Intendance*. They were not however, satisfied with this system, and often complained of the manner in which the French treated them, both on account of the insufficiency and the bad quality of part of the supplies—they actually declared that the goods of excellent quality supplied by the British were exchanged during transit through the French offices, for others of inferior quality. They also objected to the tone which the French adopted towards them, never

letting them forget that it was they (the French) who were maintaining them. The French on their part complained of the excessive demands of the Serbians, to whom they attributed what they called *la mentalité des sinistrés*.

Relations between officers and soldiers were not always good. The soldiers complained of being neglected and ill-treated by their officers, and even accused some of them of financial dishonesty. An American doctor, who had lived long in Serbia and with the Serbian Army and knew the language well, assured me that these accusations were justified, and that the Serbian civil and military administration was both corrupt and incompetent. He believed, indeed, that when the Serbian Government succeeded in re-establishing itself in Serbia it would encounter serious difficulties with the population because the Austrian Government, although politically oppressive, had accustomed it to a more honest and competent civil service than that of the Serbian State. These difficulties were due in part, according to this same American, to the great gap existing between the slightly educated classes, to whom the officers belonged, and the ignorant peasants, who formed the common soldiers. The officers did not take sufficient care for the well-being of their men, and a very large number of them lived comfortably at Salonica, where they had little to do, while the soldiers and the rest of the officers were fighting and suffering great hardships at the front. There is certainly some exaggeration in all this, but there is also some truth. In a general way, the officers of the old Serbian Army were excellent, but as a really educated bourgeoisie does not exist in the country, most of the reserve officers, drawn from the semi-educated middle classes, left a great deal to be desired. Another difficulty was due to the fact that the Government was at Corfu while the army, which represented all that remained of the nation, was in Macedonia, and the former soon lost all touch with the latter. The atmosphere of Corfu had become a hotbed of personal ambitions, intrigues and petty spite. The Serbians themselves called it their Capua. Among



the Serbians moreover, as I have said, secret societies flourished, and these found a field of great activity in the conditions of the moment. Even exile did not make the Serbians forget the habit of conspiracy.

From the moment the Serbian Army took up its position in Macedonia its front extended from the eastern arm of the Cerna to the neighbourhood of Nonte. Divided after its reorganization into 3 armies, these were as we have seen, in consequence of the reduction of the effectives, reduced to 2 of 3 divisions each, plus the cavalry division. The I Army (Drina, Morava and Timok Divisions) commanded by Voivod Michich, had its H.Q. at Votchtran and occupied the western sector; the II (Vardar, Danube and Shumadia Divisions), commanded by Voivod Stepanovich, occupied the eastern sector, with its H.Q. at Dragomantzi. Although the Serbian G.H.Q. was at Salonica, there was also an advanced G.H.Q. near Mount Floka. The ground on the Serbian front was extremely rough, with huge masses of rock, high peaks and great forests spread over it. The area of the II Army was a particularly uncomfortable one, as it was almost everywhere exposed to the enemy fire. The roads were few and bad, and communications extremely difficult. For its supplies, the I Army made use of the Monastir railway as far as Sakulevo, then of the *décauville* for a few kilometres, and finally of the ordinary roads. The II Army could not use the railway beyond Vertekop. At the railway terminus there were motor parks supplied by the British, who organized an excellent service, principally with small Ford lorries which could go anywhere, even over the most impossible roads. The Serbians knew how to make the best use of the scanty agricultural resources of the country, and although they complained that the least fertile areas had been assigned to them, they managed so well that their horses never lacked forage and always appeared fat and well fed. They were indeed excellent horse-masters.

In the early days of the Macedonian campaign our relations with the Serbs were somewhat cold. We could not help admiring their splendid military qualities and

burning patriotism, although we did not fail to notice their serious defects of character, due to Oriental tradition. The Serbs, on their part, were irritated against us on account of the incidents in Albania already mentioned. General Petitti, however, made every effort to eliminate misunderstandings by means of a conciliatory and cordial policy. He began by the cession of materials, of which the Serbians were in sore need, and did it with the greatest possible tact, so as to avoid in any way hurting their feelings. The Serbs, as we have said, were dependent on the French for their services, and General Petitti, knowing that the latter were not always adequate, often assisted them with motor vehicles, movable huts, etc., whenever the occasion arose. As it was necessary to evacuate the civilian population from a part of the Italian area, he made a point of always consulting the Serbian authorities, to whom he showed the greatest possible deference, before taking any action, and he provided transport and even food for the people who were being evacuated. Relations between our troops and the Serbian troops and the civilian population never gave rise to any incident, and the Serbians could not help admiring the order and efficiency of our transport and other services and the condition of our animals, to which they were not accustomed in Macedonia, except in the case of their own horses. In his work of conciliating the Serbians, General Petitti found useful collaborators in Lieutenant Cangià, Italian liaison officer with the I Serbian Army, in Captain Goad, British liaison officer with the 35th Division, and in Dr. Reiss the Swiss scientist, who was a good friend of ours and of the Serbians.

When General Petitti was requested to grant facilities for the journey of Voivod Michich's wife from Italy, he arranged that she should cross on one of our best steamers and then travel on an Italian staff car from Santi Quaranta, escorted by an Italian officer. The Voivod had first applied to the French authorities, who informed him that his wife must travel via Patras. He therefore preferred that she should avail herself of the facilities offered by the Italians.

On the occasion of the fighting in February 1917 on Hill 1050, Voivod Michich, who had been present, sent a message to General Petitti<sup>1</sup> expressing his unbounded admiration for the dash and gallantry of our troops, which was sent to Italy and published, and made a very good impression.

Personal relations between our officers and soldiers and the Serbians went on improving, and many cordial individual friendships were formed. General Mombelli continued General Petitti's policy for a *rapprochement* with the Serbians and intensified it. He was on excellent terms with the Prince Regent and neglected nothing to render himself a *persona grata* with him and his army. Our Command was very generous in concessions of motor transport to Serbian officers and officials travelling between Salonica, the Serbian front, and Corfu, and they constantly applied to us for this purpose, preferring our service even to that which was subsequently instituted by their own Command.

We also co-operated in Serbian propaganda in Macedonia. In the small strip of Serbian territory reoccupied after the capture of Monastir, there was a mixed Serbo-Bulgarian population of somewhat uncertain political sentiments, but predominantly Bulgarian. The Serbian Government did everything to spread the Serbian idea among the inhabitants by means of schools and propaganda. In the villages of Brod and Tepavei, which were in our military area, General Mombelli had some schools built by Italian soldiers for the native children. The Serbian Relief Fund (a British association) and the American Red Cross provided food, clothes, furniture etc. and also some nurses, while the Serbian Government provided the teachers. The inauguration of the school at Brod was a very pleasant festival of Italo-Serb cordiality.

The great weakness of the Serbian Army was its deficiency in effectives, and this became more serious day by day. While all the Allies in Macedonia suffered from the same trouble, because the Governments and General Staffs were reluctant to send reinforcements (only our expeditionary

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A.

force was kept up to strength, at all events until the autumn of 1917), the condition of the Serbs was far more serious, because, save for small groups of volunteers from Europe and America, very often of advanced age and unable to endure hardships, there was no source whence reinforcements could be drawn to make good the constant losses caused by fighting and sickness. "Our reinforcements," said a field officer attached to the Serbian G.H.Q., "are always the same—the men who come out of hospital more or less cured." This was a cause of great depression among the Serbians, and in spite of their intense patriotism, there were, as we shall see, moments in which their faith faltered and they contemplated the possibility of concluding a separate peace. This tendency among certain parties was very marked, and resulted in sundry plots and intrigues.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE ITALIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

THE Italian expeditionary force, as we have seen, reached Macedonia in August 1916 ; after a short stay at Salonica it was transferred to the Krusha Balkan near Lake Doiran, and then to the Cerna loop, where it remained until the offensive of September 1918. At Salonica the Italian base was created, which subsequently became a detached section of the *Intendenza* at Taranto (commonly known in "initial" language, adopted in the Italian Army in imitation of the British, as the "U.S.I.A.M."—*Ufficio staccato Intendenza Albania-Macedonia*). The latter comprised the sanitary branch, the commissariat department, the engineer command, artillery and engineer parks, the H.Q. of the M.T. service, many depots of various kinds, ammunition dumps, the garrison command, the *Comando di Tappa* (where officers and men were forwarded to their destinations) the court martial,<sup>1</sup> the convalescent camp, the remount camp, etc. Part of these establishments were at Zeitenlik, some 4 or 5 km. from the town, and on the outskirts were the three military hospitals, one of which was the old Italian civilian hospital, enlarged and militarized.

Our base had to be created in very difficult conditions, because when we came to Salonica most of the scanty resources of the country had already been requisitioned by the French and British Armies, who had been in the country for ten months, so that we had to be content with leavings. Furthermore, owing to the comparatively small size of our contingent, we had to do without many institutions which would have contributed to the welfare of our men

<sup>1</sup> Military tribunals in the Italian Army are organized on a permanent basis.

as well as to our national prestige. Unlike the British and French, we had few officers accustomed to dealing with Oriental conditions. Nevertheless we managed to create a base which in many respects was a model of its kind, and our soldiers with their great ingenuity succeeded in making up for other material deficiencies. A British medical officer, whom I escorted on a visit of inspection to our military hospitals, was quite astonished at the sight of what Italian soldiers had been able to create out of nothing, and at the comparatively low cost at which these results had been achieved. The men showed a love for their work which aroused the admiration of everyone. When the Italian troops left the Krusha Balkan, where they were relieved by the British, there was a certain bridge which they had begun; the men engaged on the work asked to be left behind to finish it, because they feared that their British successors might not carry out the plan according to the original design.

The Italians at the base and on the lines of communication maintained an excellent discipline, and were always noted for their good conduct and almost total absence of drunkenness. Nor did one ever see Italian officers take part in the outrageous orgies at the Tour Blanche or other night resorts. If one criticism can be made it is addressed to those who were responsible for selecting the officers to be sent to Macedonia; only the most educated, best mannered and most gentlemanly men should have been chosen for a force which was to be in such constant contact with other armies. Whereas the great majority did fulfil these requisites, the same cannot be said of all; if they never got drunk, there were some who were not *à la hauteur* as regards character and conduct. The French made the same mistake, and indeed not a few of their officers were sent to Macedonia as a punishment. It was only the British who, as we have seen, made a point of sending out their best men, especially those on Staff appointments. If this insufficient consideration of character and manners is a general defect of our whole bureaucratic system, a special effort should have been made to overcome it in connexion with the Eastern expedition.

The excellent organization of our base services was largely due to the merit of Major (now Colonel) Fenoglietto, director of the *Intendenza*, who in all the confusion of Macedonian conditions never lost his head or his temper, and succeeded in conciliating the most opposite tendencies and the most crotchety characters. Organizing capacity such as his was particularly necessary, inasmuch as Salonica was our only base for supplying a force of over 50,000 men ; even when the Santi Quaranta route was opened up and reinforcements and men going home on leave or returning began to travel that way, supplies, munitions, and material of all sorts continued to be landed at Salonica, and everything was concentrated at that base.

There was not on the front in Italy a division or even an army corps whose first lines were so far from their base as were those of the 35th Division. The distance from Salonica to Hill 1050 was not less than 170 km., most of which had to be covered either by the Monastir railway, which also supplied seven French divisions, all the Serbian Army, and at different times sundry Greek and Russian units, or by the high road, which also was in part used to supply those same forces. The railway journey was not a pleasant experience ; one spent the night in a sordid dilapidated coach, often enlivened by bugs, with broken windows and torn cushions. This *train de luxe* conveyed us to Armenohor (the station for Florina), whence one continued the journey by lorry. It was more interesting to go the whole way by lorry or car, as well as quicker and more comfortable.

On emerging from the narrow ill-paved streets of Salonica we get on to the wide and very dusty Monastir road, overcoming numerous obstacles in the shape of holes and other irregularities. Right and left the British depots and dumps spread out over vast areas. Once the last huts and sheds are left behind, we cross the wide desert plain of the Vardar, partly marshy and very little cultivated, enclosed on the north-east by the mountains behind Vodena. The vast pastures and the silvery patches of water, with the background of distant blue mountains, remind one of the Roman Campagna, but on a larger scale, less populated and lacking



in those stately ruins which render the country round Rome so deeply suggestive and give it that sense of vitality derived from the remains of the past. Here too there are historic memories in abundance, for many splendid civilizations flourished in this land, but the innumerable Barbarian invasions which devastated Macedonia have wiped out almost every trace of them, and it would be necessary to excavate in order to find ancient remains.

Shortly before reaching Yenidje-Vardar a strange-looking structure appears to the right of the road; it consists of massive walls and great blocks of stone into which iron pipes have been introduced, whence water pours out in abundance. It is popularly known as the Fountain of Alexander, and is, in fact, on the site of the ancient Pella, Alexander the Great's capital; not far off, amid the fields, the ruined arches of an ancient aqueduct may be seen. The fountain has been restored by the Allied troops and is used by their pack and transport animals. It was probably in the main piazza of the town; there, where the horses of the great Macedonian king were watered twenty-two centuries ago, those of the Chasseurs d'Afrique and of the Cavallergeri di Lucca and of the A.S.C. of the Armée d'Orient were watered but yesterday.

Every now and then our car is held up by a Senegalese sentry—the French make much use of these troops for their lines-of-communication services—but as soon as he sees that it contains Allied officers we are allowed to pass on. Soon after Alexander's fountain we reach Yenidje-Vardar. It is a large village, the only place of any importance along the 85 km. between Salonica and Voden, built on a ridge which declines gradually towards the high road; it is very Oriental and picturesque, dirty, and in a state of utter dilapidation. The open shops, with their poor wares exposed on their window sills, are typically Turkish; the narrow, tortuous, dirty side-streets, the large trees and the abundance of greenery, and the numerous minarets are signs that we are in the really Turkish East. The largest of the mosques is externally handsome in appearance and imposing, but internally almost a ruin. It had been occupied successively by Turkish troops



in flight, by Greeks in pursuit, and then by French, Serbs, Italians and Russians passing through ; even up to the end of the war it served as a temporary shelter for French transport animals. The walls around the courtyard had been adorned by the Greeks with the names of their victories in the two Balkan wars—Yenidje-Vardar, for it was here that the battle which decided the fate of Salonica took place on November 1st–2nd, 1912,—a victory due to the Diadoch Constantine—Kilkish (July 4th, 1913), Doiran (July 7th), etc. Close to the mosque is the mausoleum, also in ruins, of the Hadzi-Evremos family, who have a curious history. Its founder was a Greek converted to Islam in the reign of Osman (1317) and appointed Governor of Brussa ; in the expedition for the conquest of Salonica (1428), when Yenidje-Vardar was the capital of Turkish Macedonia, several members of the family distinguished themselves as stout warriors and pious Moslems. For these merits the Sultan Murad II endowed them with the tithe of Yenidje-Vardar in perpetuity, i.e. he granted them the right to raise and enjoy the taxes in that district. This constituted an important revenue, and the Hadji-Evremos became one of the wealthiest families in the Empire, retaining their riches until our own times—a rare distinction in Turkey. But with the Greek conquest of Salonica the Hellenic Government refused to recognize their right which it regarded as derogatory to the prerogatives of the State. There were protracted discussions on this point during the peace negotiations, but the Turkish Government in the end had to give way, and the Hadji Evremos lost their revenues. The story of this family thus marks the beginning and the end of Turkish rule in Salonica. Yenidje has lost almost all its ancient importance. It is still frequented as an agricultural centre in a townless territory ; the country round is fertile and fairly well cultivated, but malarious.

Some 25 km. further on, after crossing several branches of the Nisi Voda river, we reach Vertekop, at the foot of the mountains ; here we again meet the Monastir railway, which has made a wide curve from Salonica, passing

Verria and Niaussa, before reaching Vertekop and beginning the steep ascent. After Vertekop the road enters one of the few really smiling tracts of land in this forbidding Macedonia. The Nisi river falling from the heights of Vodena on to the plain, whence it reaches the Vardar, forms innumerable cascades and runnels, glimmering white amid the thick vegetation, reminding us of

The green steep  
Whence Anio leaps  
In floods of snow-white foam.

On reaching the plain below it divides again into many branches and channels, irrigating a tract of country which is thus rendered green and fertile. The road follows one of these streams, and the sight of many fine trees, cultivated fields and orchards is very restful to the eye. There are a few buildings amid the greenery, of the usual Turco-Macedonian type, and the Orthodox monastery of Agia-Triada, in whose grounds many antique fragments have been found, including some fine statues. Along the route one occasionally encounters wayside posts guarded by aged Serbian soldiers.

Then the road begins to ascend the steep incline up to the edge of the cliff at Vodena. Looking back, we have a magnificent vista of the Vardar plain, spreading out to the sea in the south-west and surrounded by wild bare mountains. Vodena is a pleasant little town, which the Greeks are trying to Hellenize, but they have not yet been able to destroy its semi-Slav semi-Turkish appearance. Narrow streets, flanked by picturesque houses of wood and plaster, the windows barred by *musharabieh* screens, all somewhat dilapidated; here and there a few more pretentious modern buildings, large trees in the middle of the streets and many runnels along the side walks, Oriental bazaars and cafés—the usual Macedonian ensemble. Of antiquity we see no trace, save a few fragments of ancient walls, but it is certain that if excavations were made remains at least of the Byzantine epoch would be unearthed. Amid the variegated

Oriental crowd, French and Serbian officers and soldiers strut about, and occasionally a few Senegalese.

Just beyond Vodena is Vladovo, a large Bulgarian village, after which the road ascends a broad, fresh, green valley, the sides of which, in spite of the ruthless destruction, are still clad with forests of high trees and thick undergrowth. The forest of Kindrovo had been assigned to our army, and it was there that timber was cut for trench and barbed wire supports, and firewood for the bakeries and heating. There was plenty of raw material, but every now and then a breakdown occurred on the railway and for a time no more wood could be transported ; and then every expedient had to be resorted to to procure the indispensable fuel.

The scenery now becomes less smiling, and soon after we emerge into the arid basin of Ostrovo with its pretty blue lake amid high bare mountains. We are now in a rocky, mountainous region, without a tree or a house ; at every turn we have a fresh glimpse of the Lake of Ostrovo, whose irregular bays penetrate into the folds of the mountains, and then further off we see the silvery surface of Lake Petrsko. Gornichevo, at the top of the pass, is a gloomy, forbidding village, of primitive houses of rough stone, swept by icy winds in winter. Here were fought fierce combats between Serbs and Bulgars in the summer of 1916, and here the former held up the advance of the enemy who, if they had reached the lake, would have had an open road before them to Vodena, and perhaps even to Salonica.

From Gornichevo the road descends by a series of hairpin bends into the vast plain of Florina, which merges insensibly into that of Monastir and Prilep. We pass through Vrbeni, a picturesque village, which still bears the traces of the fighting in 1916, and close by are the vast French and Italian dumps and depot of Sakulevo ; here begins a *décauville* which goes to Brod and beyond, and is used by the Italians, the I Serbian Army and two French divisions. Just beyond is Hasan Oba, where there is the Italian M.T. park. Here reigned my good friend Major Anziani, famous throughout Macedonia for his exceptional efficiency and cordial hospitality ; he had made of his unit





THE BAND OF THE 35TH DIVISION PLAYING IN THE PLACE DE LA LIBERTÉ AT SALONICA.



GENERAL GUILLAUMAT VISITS GENERAL MOMBELLI AT TEPAVCI.





a model of its kind, and indeed the Italian M.T. services in Macedonia, although far less richly endowed than those of the other Allies, always worked admirably, and in spite of the fearful strain to which they were subjected, never broke down.

A few kilometres from Hasan Oba we pass the Gracco-Bulgarian frontier, but without noticing it because it is war time, and this is the *Zone des Armées*, where only the writ of the inter-Allied Command runs. The Serbs, however, clung to this, the first tract of their fatherland to be reconquered, and although the civilian population was still very scanty—the area was too near the front—the Serbian Government had instituted prefects, sub-prefects and mayors, and even a military-agricultural commission to introduce scientific improvements in local farming. The first Serbian village is Batch, where the Crown Prince often stayed, his H.Q. being the local school. Close by was our aviation camp, with a flight commanded by Captain Aimone, a very gallant officer, many times decorated for valour and a perfect fanatic of flying, who, together with other Italian airmen, had occasion to distinguish themselves several times during the campaign. Here, too, but on the Greek side of the frontier, was one of the Scottish Women's hospitals, where, I believe, occurred the celebrated incident of the Russian soldier, knocked down and injured by an Italian lorry, conveyed in a French ambulance to a Scotch hospital in Greek territory which looked after the Serbian wounded; there he was attended to by a Canadian doctor, and the only language in which the two could converse was German! This gives one some idea of the mixed conditions of the Macedonian campaign.

After leaving Batch we reach Brod on the Cerna, where the décauville divides into two branches, one going to the front of the I Serbian Army and the other to the Italian lines. The Cerna, which is crossed here by several military bridges, is a slow, muddy, winding river; it makes a vast loop in the Monastir plain and amid the mountains west of the Vardar, within which the whole of the Italian sector, as well as those of the 16th and 17th French Colonial

Divisions were comprised. A good road, built by Italian soldiers, leads to Tepavci, which for twenty-two months was our H.Q.

Tepavci is a wretched little Macedonian village, half way up one of the barest of the nameless hills of this barren land. Close by a camp was made, which for six months sheltered the Italian Command. But during one of the long periods of inactivity on this sector, the interim commander thought of having a few stone huts built, as it seemed as though this front were to remain immobile for years. When General Mombelli took command he continued the work, and by the autumn of 1917 there was a smart new village of stone, with quarters for the officers, offices for the command, a wireless station, and a commodious mess hut decorated with clever caricatures (types of the Allied armies) by an Italian lorry driver, in which one was well sheltered from the intolerable heat of the summer as from the rigours of winter. The whole thing was done at a minimum of expense, as the raw material was there in abundance and the labour was supplied by the army. At no other H.Q. in Macedonia were the officers better housed and fed, and nowhere else were passers-by more cordially and hospitably received. General Mombelli did everything handsomely, and Tepavci became a favourite resort for Allied officers. Many indeed were the visitors to Tepavci, Italian and foreign. Among the latter was the Crown Prince of Serbia, who came there often, and was always on the best terms with General Mombelli; on the eve of the last offensive he expressed his deep regret that the Serbian Army was not to be in direct contact, during the coming operations, with the Italians, because, as he said himself, there was always cordiality between Serbs and Italians. The other Alexander, King of Greece, also came, a fanatic of motoring and an excellent horseman. Besides the three successive Commanders-in-Chief (Sarrail, Guillaumat and Franchet d'Espérey), and many other French generals, several British officers came up, including Generals Cory, the M.G.G.S., and Fairholme the Military Attaché at Athens, where he had been a colleague of General Mombelli in the work of thwarting German







espionage. Comic relief was supplied by a British north-country doctor who came out, not as a doctor, but as something else; a dissenting parson wholly innocent of papers who got through the *Zone des Armées* goodness knows how; a well-known explorer in black town clothes and a bowler hat who refused to put his horse to a canter when the road was being heavily shelled from fear of breaking his photographic plates, and was held up by the French on the charge of supposed pro-German sentiments; and an aged and amiable Transatlantic General who had not the remotest notion of what was going on in the Balkans and was chiefly interested in the farming possibilities and prospects of the country.

To get a good general idea of the Italian sector it was best to begin with a visit to the Trident, as the divisional O.P. was called, reached on horseback by mountain paths, or by motor along the new road built partly by us and partly by the French (it also supplied the two French divisions on our right). Some dug-outs had been arranged for the G.O.C. and a few officers of his Staff, who often remained there for days at a time when operations were in progress. The view was very extensive and grand. Opposite arises the famous Hill 1050, with other peaks to the right—the Piton Rocheux, the Piton Brûlé, Hill 1378, etc. Still further to the right were the French positions. Between the O.P. and Hill 1050 was a sea of rocks, gullies and hillocks, amid which the second and third lines of defence wended their way; they had been cleverly planned and executed by General Mombelli, and greatly reduced the danger of an enemy break-through. Beyond Hill 1050 the broad plain of Prilep spreads out, the *optatus alveus* of our desires, which seemed, when I ascended the Trident for the first time, so hopelessly far and unattainable. Behind Prilep, to the north, were other mountains, higher and more arduous yet—the Babuna and the Baba—so that we could not help asking ourselves: “If we do succeed in piercing the enemy lines on the terrible 1050 and reaching Prilep, shall we not find ourselves faced by other obstacles equally formidable, guarded by not less imposing defences?” More to the west lies the plain of Monastir,

once all cultivated with wheat, vegetables and fruit, but now almost deserted as it was under enemy fire. A white patch at the foot of the mountain is Monastir itself, and behind it we can make out other terrible peaks—Hill 1248, the Tzervena Stena, the Peristeri, and all the mighty barrier which separates Macedonia from Albania. To the extreme right is another wild sea of mountains, peaks and rocks extending to the Vardar—the area of the Serbian Army. Thus the whole of the western half of the Macedonian front is spread out before us like a topographical chart.

Hill 1050 is reached from Tepavci by a road, the first part of which can be used by lorries; and during the last months of the war the *décauville* from Brod had been prolonged almost to the foot of the mountain. The landscape is quite fantastic. From a wilderness of stone rise up pinnacles of black rock, suggestive of the scenery in the pictures of the Italian primitives representing the hermitages of the Thebaid, and one would hardly have been surprised if a thin, ascetic, monkish figure had suddenly emerged from a cave, or from the crevices of the rocks some monstrous dragon or serpent. Instead, we met Italian infantrymen escorting heavily laden mules, and in the little valleys we came upon A.S.C. camps or sanitary units, while from the dug-outs emerged officers in shirt-sleeves, shaving. The last bit of the road is on the flat, and being in sight of the enemy we always did it at a canter. The enemy did not keep up a systematic fire on the lines of approach, but the shell holes which we frequently encountered proved that they did fire sometimes. On other parts of our sector the approaches were so persistently shelled that supplies could only be carried up after dark.

We descend into a gully where we are fairly sheltered, and cross a broad torrent-bed, nearly dry in summer. Beyond it are sundry dug-outs excavated out of the rock, as enemy shells and trench-mortar bombs are frequently dropped. Here are detachments of Italian mountain artillery and trench-mortar batteries and of the French field and medium calibre artillery assigned to the Italian

force, but the Italian guns and trench mortars are not here; the former are higher up and further back on the slopes towards the east, hidden amid the undergrowth and rocks, whence they can fire without being discovered. The trench mortars are also higher up, but further forward, half way up Hill 1050. We now begin painfully to toil up the famous mountain, which for over twenty months has been the centre of Italian military life in Macedonia. All roads lead to 1050, all thoughts are concentrated on its hideous slopes. Steamers convey hundreds of thousands of tons of food and munitions to feed men and guns on the hill; the Santi Quaranta road has been built in the face of immense difficulties so that lorries may transport the reinforcements sent to take the place of the killed, the wounded and the sick. From Italy and foreign countries all sorts of improved scientific instruments are brought up to help in the study of the 1050. A map department has been created at the Divisional H.Q., the principal duty of which is to portray the topography of 1050. Amid these wild rocks and lower down towards the plain numerous cemeteries have been made where sleep the victims of the pitiless monster, and they are not few. The whole activity of the Italian Command is concentrated on the study of the hill in all its details, the officers on the Staff visit it day and night without respite, risking death so that they may know it better, the officers and men of the infantry regiments live on its slopes and in its caverns, and each one tries to know his own sector stone by stone, sod by sod. Every peak, every topographical detail, every gully, every tiny watercourse, every irregularity has its own fancy name, conferred on it by the soldiers on account of some fancied resemblance or remembrance—*Il Pane* (bread), *Il Capello di Napoleone* (Napoleon's hat), *La Graziosa* (the gracious one), *L'Albero isolato* (the lonely tree). Curiously enough, the figure whereby the hill is known is inaccurate; it is called Hill 1050 owing to an error in the original triangulation, and is in fact considerably higher. But as that figure appeared on the first maps of the area it has always been maintained. Seen from a distance, the hill looks like an enormous tooth, and indeed



it is a poisoned tooth, which pierces and kills. For the soldiers it has acquired a character of almost diabolical malignity. Other positions on the sector—the Piton Brûlé, the Piton Rocheux—are no less terrible, but none exercises the same baleful fascination as the 1050.

The Italian sector is not all on 1050 ; it begins at the extreme western end of the Cerna loop in the plain. The loop encircles a chain of rocky heights, arid and broken, which are an extension of the Prilep mountains, constituting what is known as the Selechka Planina, rising here and there to the height of 1,500 metres. The Cerna, which has its source in the mountains north of Monastir, flows across the plain in a southerly direction, broadening out at certain points into a marshy lake ; south-east of Monastir it makes a conversion towards the east at the foot of the Kaimakchalan, passing Brod and Skochivir, and then turns northward through a narrow mountain gorge to its confluence with the Vardar. The slopes of the Selechka Planina, high and steep in the eastern part of the loop, decline towards the west, and all the western part is flat. The Monastir-Prilep plain is one of the rare gaps through the rugged mountain chains extending across the country from east to west, a passage through which innumerable hordes and armies have made their way since the dawn of history. It is, however, dominated by the heights within the Cerna loop. The possession of those heights was therefore indispensable for dominating the Monastir corridor ; and as half of them were in the hands of the Allies and half in those of the enemy, neither side could be regarded as master of the plain and of the passage. Had we lost our positions, the road would have been open to the enemy towards Greece ; if we had succeeded in capturing the whole of the range all the enemy's communications in the Vardar valley would have been menaced. That is the meaning of the long-protracted struggle for the possession of those arid rocks.

The lowest point of the ridge is the Makovo pass ; to the north of it a long spur stretches out, whose culminating point is the famous 1050. The position, as we have seen, had been reached by the Serbs in the autumn of 1916,

and its conquest had obliged the enemy to evacuate Monastir. But the Serbs were so exhausted with the long and desperate struggle that they were unable to hold their ground, and a Bulgaro-German counter-attack drove them off the ridge. This enabled the enemy to hold their own in the Monastir area for many months longer. In order to secure the position the enemy Command garrisoned it with some of their best troops and provided it with all the most perfect defences known to the modern art of war. The fighting which took place on these rocks left their traces in the corpses with which they were covered, and the mere fact of remaining there cost the lives of innumerable Italian, French, Serbian, Russian, Bulgarian and German soldiers. The 1050 was as famous among the enemy as among our own men; in the Bulgarian town of Dubnitsa the chief restaurant was called—even after the Armistice—the “Restaurant of Hill 1050 of the Cerna.”

The enemy line followed the crest of the mountains comprised within the loop to north of the valley of the Morihovo torrent in the eastern part, and that of Hill 1050 and of the great *pitons* to the north of the Suha torrent in the western part, and then crossed the plain to a point north of Novak on the Cerna. The Allied line was a little below the crest, but at many points very close to that of the enemy. The total length of the line within the loop was about 25 km., of which the western part (a little more than half) was held by the Italians, and the rest by the French.

To the north of the Makovo pass rises a great mass of rock known as the Piton Rocheux, from whose summit the enemy dominated our lines to the right and the left, as well as the Morihovo and Suha valleys. In the Piton Rocheux the enemy had excavated numerous caverns and dug-outs, which hid machine-gun nests and sheltered the troops from the fire of Allied artillery. The Italians here occupied a series of irregular tooth-like rocks, between which were lines protected with sand-bags. But they were dominated by the enemy on the Piton Rocheux, so that one could not go from one position to another with com-

parative safety except at night. Further west the enemy held another dominant position, the Piton Brûlé, whose fire dominated the Italian positions which were out of the range of that of the Rocheux. Our infantrymen in the front lines had no other shelter in this part of the sector than the shallow holes dug into the rock known as "Serb holes," with low parapets of heaped up stones and sand-bags in front of them; they were about 30 m. from the enemy and 10 m. below them. The communication trenches between these holes were so exposed that they could only be used after dark. In no other sector of the Macedonian front were the troops more exposed to the burning heat of summer, to cold, snow and wind in winter, and to enemy fire at all seasons.

Beyond the Piton Brûlé the enemy trenches receded to some extent from ours, ascending to the summit of 1050, which was also bristling with machine guns. The enemy positions on 1050 and on the Rocheux sustained each other mutually, so that if we had succeeded in occupying the one we should have been exposed to an infernal fire from the other.

Hill 1050, seen from on high, may be compared to a long arrow-head pointing towards the north-east, with two sharp barbs, and a triangular depression between the two, about 1 km. broad at its widest. We held the south-west barb and the depressions of the Meglentzi valley; our line of main resistance ascended this spur, and at the head of the Meglentzi valley met the first line. Thence it pushed on until just below the highest ridge known as the *Castelletto* (little castle).

From the Castelletto the enemy could observe the whole Italian front from the Piton Rocheux to Novak, as well as the lines of approach, except certain little gullies hidden beneath the steep rocks, where the batteries were placed. Not a supply column, not a lorry, nor even an isolated horseman or pedestrian could escape observation. In order to give some shelter to the troops holding these positions trenches had been cut out of the rocks, every little irregularity utilized, caverns excavated in the



mountain side. But the enemy bombardments, which were often concentrated on these defences—sometimes as many as a thousand shells were dropped in one day on a very narrow tract of the line—had reduced the hill to a mass of shingle and sand which offered but slight protection.

At the head of the Meglentzi valley our front line followed a zig-zag course down into the triangular depression described. Although comparatively far from the enemy, this was one of our worst positions because it was exposed more directly to the fire of the trenches above. Here no movement at all was possible along the line in day-time, and even the wounded had to be evacuated at night, as the enemy did not hesitate to fire on them. The communication trench with the line of main resistance was equally impassable by day, although a whole battalion had to be supplied by this, the only route.

The southern barb of Hill 1050 was cut at one point by a pass or saddle, which separated the rocks of the 1050 proper from three isolated heights known as the "Mamelons of Lebac," on which were Italian defensive works; they were very important because they dominated the Meglentzi valley. The first line was here at about 1 km. to the north of them and a little beyond the ruins of the village. Below the pass there was a group of trees, which were soon reduced to mere skeletons by the constant bombardment. On the crest of the southern spur were enemy trenches, culminating in the O.P. known as "Point A," dominating the whole valley and our line as far as the Cerna. The H.Q. of the battalion defending the positions below the village of Meglentzi was in caverns dug into the side of a gully formed by a torrent, which was so steep that in some places there were two tiers of holes, one above the other.

From Meglentzi our lines followed the gully, being at one point very close to those of the enemy. Finally they left the mountain area, which here gradually declined, and crossed the swampy plain as far as the Cerna. The last 6 km. of trenches were on the flat and at some distance from the enemy. The 9 km. of mountainous front were



held by 3 regiments, whereas for the 6 km. of plain one was enough. Beyond the lines were elaborate wire entanglements. The centre of the defences in the plain was the village of Novak, east of Monastir. A tumulus in the second line, probably an ancient sepulchre, and the only eminence over a wide stretch of country, made an excellent O.P. The trenches here were all underground, and although the sector was quieter than the mountainous part, the troops suffered from floods in winter and malaria in summer.

The whole plain, which was once cultivated, was now a waste, but the grass grew high and flourished, and at night the troopers of the Lucca Cavalry went out beyond the barbed wire entanglements to mow it and bring it back to their camp—often it was the only forage available for the poor horses and mules of the 35th Division. In these agricultural-military expeditions occasionally shots were exchanged, generally without consequences.

The Cerna marked the end of our sector, and here the French area began. A wooden bridge, well defended by earthworks armed with machine guns, united the two areas. For a long time (in Macedonia units seldom changed their quarters) the division adjoining ours was the 11th Colonial, with whose officers ours were always on the best of terms. From this point a road led to Monastir, but although it was the shortest route between that town and our H.Q. no one was allowed to go along it on horseback or by motor, as it was under enemy fire. Monastir itself, which could be reached by another road, although constantly under fire, offered to those who lived on the Macedonian front the attractions of a city. A large part of the population had returned, and the shopkeepers simply coined money with their modest establishments, as they could demand what prices they liked. By the end of the war about two-thirds of the houses were in ruins, and few were those which did not bear traces of the two years' bombardment.

Let us now visit the front lines near the summit of 1050. Firing trenches, communication trenches, dug-outs, shelters of all kinds, are cut out of the living rock and it would be

difficult to imagine more uncomfortable positions than these. Near the summit our lines are but a few metres from those of the enemy, and through the loop-holes one may see the tin hats of the Germans and Bulgars. Here there have always been some German battalions. After the operations of the autumn of 1916 the German units were to a large extent withdrawn from Macedonia, and the number of German battalions from about twenty was gradually reduced to three or four; but some of them constantly remained on 1050 opposite our troops. The enemy command considered this to be the most important point of the whole defensive system, and therefore garrisoned it with the troops in which it felt most confidence. A tour through our trenches offered some curious sights. As most of the work had to be done at night, a daylight visitor found the great majority of the men fast asleep; he saw nothing but emerging feet, because the shelters opened on to the communication trenches and the soldiers slept with their heads inside and their feet stretching out towards the opening. At intervals, in some wider space, he came upon groups of soldiers washing, shaving, playing cards, reading or writing letters. There were always some, officers or men, who "did the honours" and pointed out the curiosities; it was impossible to pass near a mess without being asked in to drink a glass of good wine and eat biscuits or even cake, but if it was anywhere near meal time he was forced by friendly and cordial comrades to stay to lunch or dinner. The ingenuity with which officers and men managed to make themselves fairly comfortable in quite impossible situations was really wonderful. Hanging on to a bare mountain side, the summit of which was held by the enemy, who dominated the lines of approach and supply, who spied our every movement, in an extremely variable and always detestable climate, life under such circumstances might have seemed well-nigh unbearable. Yet our men held on there for nearly two years, in the face of an enemy stronger in numbers and in material means, as well as in more favourable positions. Nor should we forget the deadly grey monotony of life amid those rocks, varied only by

bombardments and raids—ours or the enemy's—and more rarely by attacks on a large scale, sometimes with poison gas. But the men knew that they were holding one of the keystones of the whole Macedonian defensive system, that if they gave way everything would collapse, and that the Allied armies would risk being driven into the sea. They were moreover kept up by a sense of pride and a desire to cut a good figure before the other Allies. It was considered absolutely indispensable that the Italian line should hold; and although theoretically the position was untenable, it was held without wavering, until the final victory.

There were of course long periods in which there was no fighting. On some days not a shot was heard. But it sufficed for one man to discharge his rifle to provoke a hurricane of fire from the other side. Certain visitors to our front were not at all welcome because, wishing to make themselves conspicuous, they insisted on firing a few shots or throwing a hand grenade just for the fun of the thing. The enemy replied, and a quiet day was converted into one of lively but quite useless exchange of rifle fire and shelling. This of course happened when the unfortunate visitor had already left for some more sheltered spot.

When the Italian troops took over this sector from the Serbs in December, 1916, it was almost completely unprotected. The Serbs had not had time to carry out important defensive works, and had limited themselves to digging those small holes in the earth or rock which I have already described. General Petitti at once set to work to fortify the area, and his work was continued, completed and extended by General Mombelli. During the period of our occupation, over 100 km. of trenches and communication trenches, two metres deep, were dug, 500 caverns cut out of the rock as shelters, and 120 km. of wire entanglements laid down. All this vast labour was accomplished by troops who were supposed to be at rest, for while two of the brigades were in the line the third was employed in preparing these defences.



During the early days of the campaign there was a tendency, as on all other fronts, to concentrate the largest possible number of men in the front line defences, but later the opposite tendency prevailed, viz. that the first lines should be held by an indispensable minimum of troops only, the rest of the forces being kept in reserve in well-protected shelters, ready to hasten forward at the moment of attack, and that powerful second and third lines of main resistance should be constructed. In this way the constant drain of small losses when there was no real fighting going on was avoided, and at the same time the consequences of a possible break-through in the first line were guarded against, as the enemy, in attacking the second lines would have been exposed to the fire of batteries which could easily find their range on ground perfectly well known to them. It was General Mombelli who reconstructed and reinforced the second line and created the third, which was the most powerful of the three, *ex novo*. The enemy knew very little about these defences behind the first line, and, in fact, on a German Staff map found on a prisoner, whereas the first line is represented with a fair amount of accurate detail, the second is barely sketched and in an inaccurate manner, while the third is merely hinted at with the indication "old Bulgarian trenches." This is one of the signs that the enemy was less well-informed about the Allied armies than was generally supposed.

The Italian front in Macedonia had, as we have seen, an extension of 15 km., afterwards reduced, with the diminution of strengths, to about 12. Several times, especially during Sarraill's régime, the C.A.A. tried to induce the Italian Command to extend the line towards the right, but all the three generals who successively commanded the Italian expeditionary force refused to do so, there being no reason for making the 35th Division occupy a sector wholly out of proportion to its strength as compared with those held by other Allied forces; the fact that the sector in question was one of the hardest and had the most difficult communications, so that all movements from one point to another were anything but simple, had also to be considered.



The C.A.A., in fact, ended by dropping the matter.<sup>1</sup> It was not until the summer of 1918 that we again somewhat extended our front in view of the coming offensive. As compared with conditions in Italy the Italian front in Macedonia was certainly less deadly, but in some respects it was one of the most objectionable. Unlike the troops in Italy, those in Macedonia were to a very large extent precluded from leave, and at the time of the Armistice there were no less than 30,000 men, out of a total of 50,000, who, although entitled to leave, were unable to avail themselves of the privilege; among them there were 6,000 who had been at the front for twenty-five months on end without leave. When General Mombelli took command, eleven months after the arrival of the force, no one had been on leave at all from Macedonia, and many had been at the front for many months in Italy before crossing the sea. It was at that time believed that leave for the troops in Macedonia was impossible, because they must not be exposed to the risks of the long sea-crossing when it was not absolutely indispensable, while even the journey via Santi Quaranta by lorry (which involved a shorter crossing) seemed too complicated and difficult. But General Mombelli realized the enormous importance of leave, even if comparatively few men had a chance of enjoying it; the mere thought of not being cut off from all hope of leave exercised a very great and beneficial effect on the *moral* of the troops. He therefore succeeded in overcoming the thousand obstacles in his way and organized the transport of leave parties by lorry via Santi Quaranta. This was one of his services to the 35th Division, and one which made him particularly popular with the men.

Yet in spite of the moral and material suffering, the unhealthy climate, malaria, the constant small losses, and the long enervating inaction, whenever there was something

<sup>1</sup> On the front in Italy the average sector held by a division of two brigades (the 35th had three) was 10,900 metres, but on the Western sectors of that front the troops were spread out very thin, whereas on the Asiago plateau and on the Carso the front of each division was much shorter. After Caporetto the average was reduced to 3,800 metres.

to be done, the men went to the attack with the most admirable dash. Their *moral* always remained high, and there was never among the Italian soldiers any movement of revolt or even an outward expression of discontent such as occurred among certain French units, not to speak of the Greeks and Russians, among whom mutinies were frequent.

## CHAPTER VII

### OPERATIONS IN THE WINTER AND SPRING OF 1917

FROM the capture of Monastir to the great offensive of September 1918, there were no notable changes in the situation of the two opposing armies. This does not mean that there were no military operations; there were indeed quite a number of them, some fairly important, but they produced no practical results of great moment, and the line which was stabilized in November, 1916, changed but slightly during the next twenty-two months. The Germans declared themselves satisfied with this state of things, because they considered that the Allied troops in Macedonia were immobile and therefore prevented from being sent to other fronts. Events were to prove the Germans in the wrong, but even in the Entente countries, there were persons who continued to insist, ever more strongly, on the uselessness of the Eastern campaign.

The autumn operations came to an end with the capture of Monastir, after which the enemy was not vigorously pursued, partly owing to the wish of General Sarraill himself, who was always more influenced by political considerations regarding Greece than by military conditions, and partly on account of the exhaustion of the troops. The Armée d'Orient had thus conquered the important positions on the Cerna only by half. The town of Monastir was in the hands of the French, but the heights immediately to the N.W., N. and N.E., which dominated it, were still held by the enemy. In the Cerna loop, we occupied part of Hill 1050, but as we have seen, the enemy held the topmost ridge which dominated our positions, and many of our trenches could be enfiladed. The same

conditions obtained in the eastern half of the loop held by the French. The Serbs, too, especially the units of the II Army, were dominated by the enemy, and so also were the British to the west and east of Lake Doiran. The situation was certainly not satisfactory for the Allies, and the events in Roumania, where the Austrians, Germans and Bulgarians had proved completely victorious, might at any moment be followed by the arrival of enemy reinforcements on the Macedonian front and consequently by a general attack. General Sarraill, in his memoirs, attributes the suspension of the operations to the losses suffered by all the Allies, particularly by the French and Serbs, to the inorganic plans of the British and to their small desire to risk fresh operations, to the want of energy of the Italians, due to orders from Rome to General Petitti not to act but to limit himself to being present, and to a divergence of views between the two Russian generals. In reality, the primary cause was, as usual, the want of confidence in General Sarraill on the part of the Allied commanders subordinate to him, and even on the part of some of the French commanders, and to his own want of energy in not seizing the opportune moment, after the fall of Monastir, when the enemy was in full retreat and demoralized. He might then have occupied the heights dominating the town and constituted a far better defensive line, whence it would have been possible, later on, to launch a fresh offensive in more favourable conditions. But he let the occasion slip by, and the enemy, who had been beaten but not crushed, had time to reorganize and reinforce themselves in their positions, rendering them practically impregnable.

We have seen what was the distribution of the Armée d'Orient after the fall of Monastir. Some units of the Army were not yet available—the 16th French Colonial Division, which had been sent out from France, had not yet all landed—the 60th British Division was at Ekaterini to watch the Greeks, and a Serbian division was performing a similar duty at Grevena. At this time (December, 1916) the conditions of the Serbian Army were causing anxiety. General Boyovich had requested that it should



all be brought into the second line, as it was thoroughly exhausted. General Sarrail was unable to satisfy his wish, save in the case of three divisions. The most serious aspect of the situation was the internal political crisis through which the Serbian officers were passing. General Sarrail himself telegraphed to Paris on January 3, 1917: "Influential partisans of Black Hand have been sent to Bizerta. Commander Morava Division, several Brigade Commanders, Chief of Staff Shumadia Division, Assistant Chief of Staff III Army have been relieved of their positions."<sup>1</sup> Soon after he telegraphed that, according to a Serbian order: "In consequence of plot some officers have been cashiered and will be replaced by officers friendly to present régime." He also mentioned that several regicide officers to whom the present Dynasty owed the throne had been punished. "Movement among officers seems to continue—colonel who ripped open Queen Draga's corpse has been imprisoned." In March he telegraphed that there had been a new plot against the Prince Regent, and that he believed that shots had been fired at him. Later this statement was confirmed. It was a conspiracy on the part of officers affiliated to the secret societies, and who wished to murder the Prince Regent and to accept the Austrian peace proposals. The movement was crushed, and several officers condemned to death or imprisonment.

In Albania, the situation was still insecure and chaotic. The Italian XVI Corps was spread over the area from the mouth of the Voyussa to the neighbourhood of Liaskoviki. Along the lower Voyussa there were regular defensive lines, but beyond there were only isolated posts and mobile detachments composed largely of Albanian irregulars. Opposite the Italians was the XIX Austro-Hungarian Corps composed of the 47th Division and the 1/19th *Gruppenkommando*, which extended to the neighbourhood of Lake Ochrida. There was not yet any liaison between our XVI Corps and the Armée d'Orient.

North of Koritza towards Pogradetz on Lake Ochrida, there were some Austrian forces, about a brigade, and some Bulgarian detachments; it was always feared that these

<sup>1</sup> Sarrail, *op. cit.* p. 219.

troops might menace the left flank of the French. The latter therefore wished to extend their occupation so as to establish a connexion with our troops in Albania, who, throughout the autumn of 1916, had been advancing from the coast towards the interior. Besides the Austrians and Hungarians, there were several Albanian bands enrolled by the celebrated Salih Butka between Koritza and Tchafa Kiarit, and those of Hussein Nikolitza between Koritza and Ersek. General Sarrail thought it advisable to reinforce the garrison at Koritza, where he sent the 76th Division, recently arrived from France, so as to ward off any danger on the part of the Albanian bands and the Austro-Bulgarian detachments, and also to menace the right flank of the enemy's forces in Macedonia. He communicated with General Ferrero, Commander of our troops in Albania by wireless and by means of flying officers, and thus a common Franco-Italian operation was arranged to commence on February 17th, with the object of freeing the road between Koritza and Ersek. But General Sarrail also wished to extend his own operation area in Albania, perhaps with a view to having something with which to negotiate in his dealings with M. Venizelos, and therefore, in spite of the agreement with General Ferrero, he commenced operations before the date established, and began his advance from Koritza on the 15th. After a small skirmish with the Albanian bands he occupied Kamenitza, Hill 907, to the right and to the left of the Ersek road, on the 16th Tchafa Kiarit, Helmiz, and Lubonia, sending reconnaissances as far as Ersek, and on the 17th the French infantry, under General de Vassart, met our troops under Colonel Rossi at Ersek. General Sarrail wished Ersek to remain in possession of the French troops, and had tried to obtain this result by means of the little trick of anticipating the date for commencing operations. In his memoirs he states that he had asked General Ferrero's permission to occupy Ersek and that the latter refused, saying: "Ersek must be left for the Italians." In reality it had always been agreed that Ersek was to be included in our area, and General Sarrail knew it. Otherwise he would not

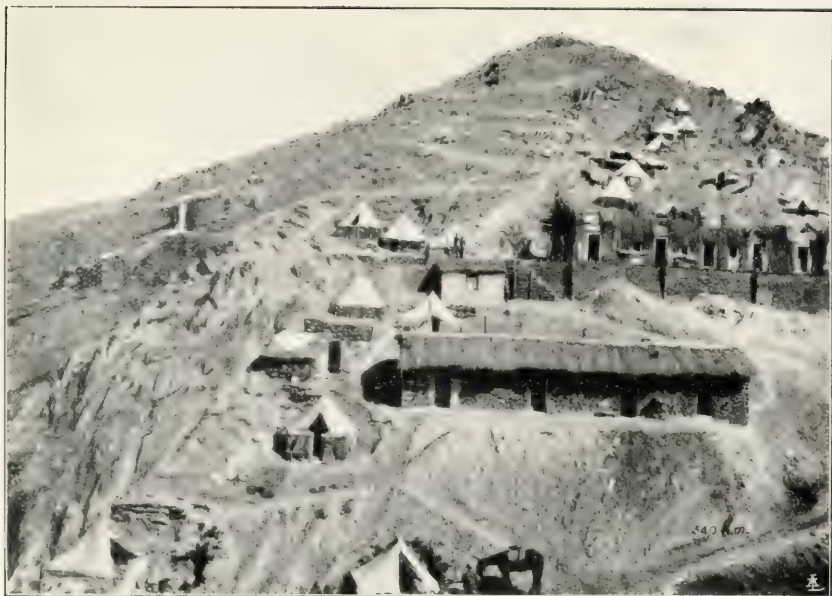
have made the above-mentioned attempt. He ended by recognizing his error, or rather, he threw the blame on the commander of the detachment operating towards Tchafa Kiarit, who, according to the General, had acted on his own initiative.

A definite connexion between the French and Italians across Albania was thus established, and the whole road from Santi Quaranta to Florina was opened up for communications between the Allies, and closed to Greece and the Central Empires.

As we have seen, the Allies in Macedonia, at the beginning of 1917, were not in a position to attempt an offensive on a large scale. On the other hand, even the enemy did not seem to be very anxious to attack. In Roumania, Germany and Austria had lost many men, and all their available reinforcements, in spite of the progressive weakening of Russia, were absorbed on the French or Italian fronts. The Bulgarians might perhaps have done more, but they were not enthusiastic over the idea of throwing themselves headlong into an offensive, the result of which might have been the conquest of Salonica, while they knew that that city was reserved for Austria and not for them. Consequently, except for the town of Monastir, for which they had a special sentiment, all the territorial aims to which they might reasonably aspire were in their own hands, so that they had no strong inducement to face fresh risks. These are the reasons why the enemy did not then attempt a great offensive in the Mackensen style, when the Allies were weak and divided, and when their Governments refused to send large reinforcements to the East. This does not mean that they remained passive. In February they attempted operations which might have had dangerous results for the whole of the Armée d'Orient, if it had not been held up by the gallant defence of the 35th Division.

On the evening of February 12th, at 18.45 hours the trenches occupied by two companies of the 162nd Infantry (Ivrea Brigade) in the west sector of Hill 1050, were subjected to a tremendous bombardment by artillery, hand grenades, trench mortars and flame-throwers. It was the first time that the latter terrible weapon was





CAMP NEAR THE PARALOVO MONASTERY.



HEADQUARTERS OF AN INFANTRY REGIMENT ON HILL 1050.





employed on the Balkan front, so that its effects came as a complete surprise. Our first lines were smashed up by the explosions, about 600 m. of trench were wrested from their gallant defenders, and half a company was destroyed in a horrible manner by the flames. The survivors, strengthened by another company under the command of Captain Odello, were able to hold up the enemy advance along a lower line in the rear, and immediately afterwards a counter-attack was launched. Fighting continued throughout the night and the next day. In the evening, Colonel Basso, Commander of the regiment, personally took command of the troops destined for the counter-attack. He reorganized the battalions, re-established the communications which had been cut and, after a bombardment by our artillery, the infantry moved to attack at 15 hours on the 15th. Two of the lost trenches were then recaptured, although the enemy reacted vigorously by means of artillery, trench-mortar and machine-gun fire, our infantry continued slowly to advance during the whole of the day. After a short halt in the afternoon, rendered necessary by the visibility, the attack was resumed and several more trenches recaptured.

About a fortnight later our Command decided to make another attack. On the evening of February 27th, we opened a violent bombardment on the enemy positions with 150 guns, which fired some 20,000 rounds on the enemy defences on Hill 1050 on the Piton Brûlé, east of the latter. After about two hours' fire with good results, the infantry attack to recapture the remaining positions which had been lost on February 11th was launched. The enemy kept up a very hot fire on our positions on Hill 1050 and on the lines of approach. At about 18 hours the scout section and the 11th Company of the 162nd Infantry, followed by the 9th and 2nd Companies issued from the trenches, and hurled themselves with splendid dash on the enemy positions, recapturing them and reaching the enemy dug-outs, where they captured about 70 prisoners. The 11th Company was able to hold the captured ground for some time, but while the scouts were

trying to strengthen themselves in the conquered positions, a mine, prepared by the enemy, exploded and blew up the trench, killing nearly the whole of the detachment. The few survivors, supported by part of the 9th Company, clung desperately to the captured ground ; two of the three scout officers and four of those of the 9th Company (including the captain) and many other ranks had fallen. A violent machine-gun fire and a furious enemy counter-attack obliged these gallant survivors to fall back on their original positions. Two more companies were sent to reinforce them, with Major Negro commanding the attacking troops, together with the remnants of the company already so hardly hit, returned to the charge ; but the machine-guns on Hill 1050 rendered even this new attack fruitless. The 11th Company, now reduced to its captain and a few men, and reinforced by part of the 2nd Company, continued to hold the conquered position, although it was isolated and subjected to a heavy enfilading fire from the enemy artillery, which ours was not able to silence, because the range of the enemy's emplacements had not been found. The brave detachment consequently had to be recalled.

We had thus recaptured all the lost positions except a small hummock on the crest of Hill 1050 which remained abandoned by both sides. It was the object of vigorous shelling and neither we nor the enemy were able to occupy it definitely. Its form was altered by the bombardment.

Our losses in this engagement amounted to about 400 men ; those of the enemy were probably equally numerous. The episode is interesting inasmuch as this was the first time in which Italian troops were engaged in a hand-to-hand encounter with the Germans, and the 74 prisoners captured by our men were all Germans, belonging to the 9th and 10th Jäger Battalions, and to the 205th Company of Engineers. All our detachments which took part in the action behaved admirably. If the attack did not succeed in driving the enemy from the crest of Hill 1050, it served to prove that that position could not be taken by a frontal attack unless the Piton Rocheux on the right had been first captured, because it was the batteries behind the latter that dominated Hill 1050, so that even though

the latter had been captured, the troops who occupied it would have been exposed to the enfilading fire of the said batteries. The Piton Rocheux was the chief protection of the enemy artillery, which could not be identified nor silenced on account of the deep gullies with steep sides in which they were hidden, and also because of the insufficiency of our air force. If the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies had learnt the lesson from this episode he would have avoided the failure and heavy losses which he suffered in subsequent attacks, but General Sarraill does not appear to have known exactly how this action had taken place nor its result. At least that is what we must conclude from what he writes in his memoirs,<sup>1</sup> in which he says that we had lost Hill 1050 on February 12th, and that in the operations of February 28th we had not been able to recapture it, though losing 400 men. In fact, he says "*malgré, paraît-il, 400 hommes hors de combat,*" as though he doubted that we had had such losses. It is easy to see how many inaccuracies, not to use a cruder expression, this statement contains. We did not lose Hill 1050 on the 12th of February for the good reason that we had never occupied it. It was, as we have seen, the Serbs who had lost it some months before, immediately after capturing it; of the trenches which we had actually lost on February 12th we recaptured nearly all, partly in the attack on February 13th, and the others in that on the 27th. There only remained the very small bit which I have mentioned, and even the enemy could not hold this permanently.

These operations, and others on other sectors of the front, were only a prelude to a wider action which General Sarraill intended to conduct in the spring in order to try to break through the enemy line. As regards our own sector, General Petitti had proposed a very promising and well thought out plan of operations. The enemy positions on Hill 1050 were to be outflanked and only a demonstrative frontal action was to be developed against them, whereas the line was to be broken at the salient of Vlaklar, and the Piton Rocheux occupied in order to destroy the artillery behind it. But in the month of March our sector of

<sup>1</sup> Pages 206-7.



front was shortened and part of the positions on the Piton Rocheux were given over to the French, so that this area remained divided between the Italians and the French.

The first phase of the offensive, according to Sarraill's plan, was to consist of a flanking movement with the object of breaking the enemy line between the Lakes of Ochrida and Presba; Allied forces were then to march round the latter, occupy Resna, and thence threaten the enemy's communications behind the Monastir front. At the same time a frontal attack from Monastir was to be delivered against Hill 1248 so as to give the town, which was always under enemy fire, a wider breathing space. On March 11th, the operations between the two lakes began with an attack by the 76th French Division. Important preparations had been made for transport along the difficult Pisoderi road between Florina and Koritza, but the enemy's resistance proved more vigorous than was expected, and this fact, together with the extremely bad weather which set in just then, caused the flanking movement to fail, and it was soon abandoned. On the 13th a small operation was carried out by detachments of the 63rd Italian Infantry Regiment on Hill 1050 and certain enemy trenches, which formed a troublesome salient within our lines, were captured. The French attack on Hill 1248, which was to have been delivered at the same time, did not commence until the 14th. After an intense bombardment, the French attacked the Tzrvena-Stena west of Monastir, and captured some strong entrenchments; others were captured on Hill 1248. On the 18th, after other lively engagements, the French captured the whole of Hill 1248 as well as the fortified village of Krklina, taking 1,200 prisoners. But the enemy succeeded, by a counter-attack, in recapturing part of Hill 1248, whose summit remained abandoned by both sides. Monastir was somewhat relieved, but the town continued to remain under fire until the Armistice, and more than half of it was destroyed. It cannot be said that the bombardment was unjustified because, besides various Commands, the French had placed a number of batteries there.



HELIOGRAPH IN A CAVERN ON HILL 1050.



ROCK-PERFORATING MACHINE ON HILL 1050.



On March 25th, the enemy again attacked the positions of the 63rd Infantry Regiment on Hill 1050, but were repulsed. After another quiet period the offensive was to be resumed in April, and this time the British were to deliver the attack. General Sarrail wanted them to advance simultaneously on Serres and Doiran, but General Milne replied that with his weak effectives he could not attempt an offensive on both sectors, and he decided to limit himself to the Doiran front. He probably realized that General Sarrail wanted him to attack Serres solely for political reasons, because Serres, being a place which even the ordinary public had heard of, its capture would have been a good advertisement for the Armée d'Orient, but if the capture of the town appeared fairly easy, it would have been very difficult to hold it, as it was dominated by formidable Bulgarian positions on the hills behind it.

On April 25th the British attack was launched. The immediate objective was the capture of the Grand and Petit Couronné, extremely strong positions defending the passage between Lake Doiran and the Vardar. Their capture would have opened two roads, that of the Vardar Valley with the railway along the river, and that of the Kosturino Pass towards Strumitza and the interior of Bulgaria. This sector of the front was, like that of the Cerna loop and that of Hill 1248, similar to the fronts of Italy and France, inasmuch as it was provided with all the defensive systems known to modern warfare, and the lines of the two adversaries were very close together, but it differed from the European fronts as all the sectors of Macedonia differed from them, owing to the far greater difficulties of supply and communications. Between Lake Doiran and the Vardar the 22nd and 26th Divisions were distributed (XII Corps), and they had held that sector for almost a year. The ground was extremely broken, and if the mountains occupied by the enemy were not very high, they dominated the British positions and were very well adapted for a strenuous defence. The most conspicuous point of the British position was a long hill like a hump, which the French had named La Tortue,

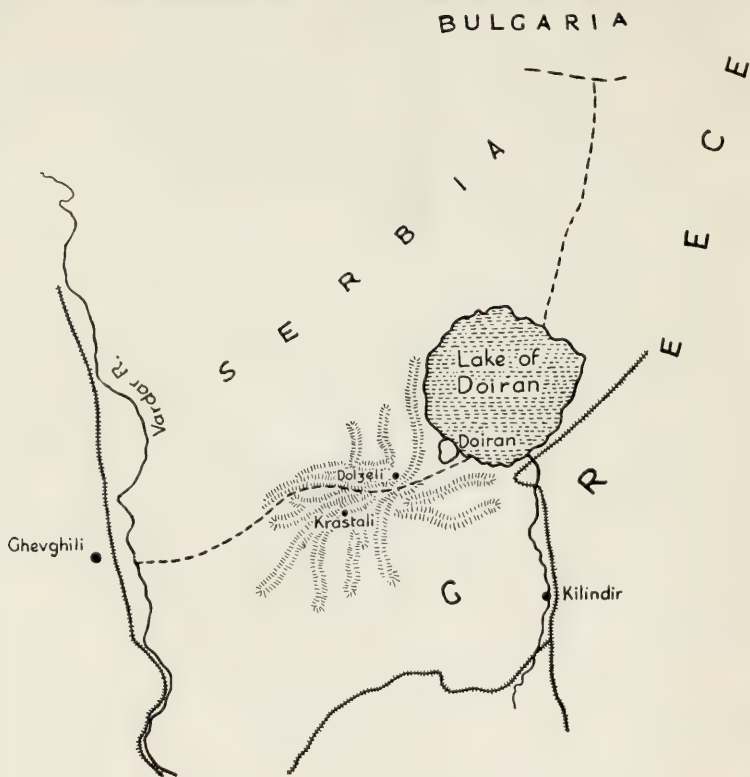


on account of its resemblance to the back of a tortoise. The British trenches lay along the ridge on La Tortue, beside which rose the Petit Couronné of about the same height, which was the principal bastion of the first line defences of the Bulgarians. Between the two heights there was a deep gully, known as the Ravin des Jumeaux. Behind La Tortue were other hills, all dominated by the two formidable positions of the Grand Couronné near the lake, and the P ridges, the former 600 m. above the sea, and the highest point of the latter (P 2), 700 m.

On April 22nd the British artillery opened a heavy preparatory bombardment which lasted throughout the 24th, so that the Bulgarians had no difficulty in knowing that an attack was imminent, and they took the necessary precautions. On the night of the 24th–25th the attack was delivered—the 65th and 66th Brigades of the 22nd Division to the left, and the 78th and 79th Brigades of the 26th Division to the right, took part in it. Various trenches in the enemy line were occupied, both on the Petit Couronné near the lake, and further to the left. The losses were heavy, especially in the Jumeaux Ravine, and the Bulgarian defences proved stronger than had been anticipated. The enemy, moreover, was able to bring up reinforcements more rapidly than the British could do, both on account of the shorter distance that they had to traverse and the fact that the ground was less broken on their side. The British were violently counter-attacked and mown down by machine-gun fire, and consequently had to withdraw to their original positions, except on the extreme left of the sector of attack where they were able to hold some of the captured trenches in the Dolzeli-Krastali sector. The Bulgarian counter-offensive against these positions, between the 26th and 28th, was driven back with heavy losses; the total British losses amounted to about 3,000. The troops had all behaved with conspicuous gallantry, the battalions of the Devonshire and Berkshire Regiments being specially mentioned.

Early in May, General Petitti di Roreto was recalled to Italy to take up an important Command; he was





AREA OF THE BRITISH XII CORPS.

succeeded in Macedonia by General Pennella, who arrived at Tepavci on the eve of the important offensive of that month. This attack was to have been delivered simultaneously in the Cerna loop by the Italians and the French, on the Dobropolje by the Serbs, and in the Vardar-Doiran sector by the British. But General Sarraill was anxious about other matters besides military considerations. In Greece the political situation was becoming ever more critical, and while he was preparing for the offensive on the Macedonian front, an offensive which everybody knew about, including of course, the enemy, he was already contemplating an expedition to Greece, which prevented him from concentrating all his efforts against the Bulgarians and Germans. He even told an Italian field officer that he did not hope to obtain more than a partial success on the front and perhaps reach Prilep, and that, as soon as he had achieved some advantage, he would send 3 divisions to Thessaly to obtain possession of the harvest. This was important both for the supplies of the Armée d'Orient and to prevent the Greeks, then under the rule of King Constantine, from getting supplies. Greece would thus have been placed at the mercy of the Entente. But he was already meditating, as we shall see, a broader offensive against King Constantine, and his chief error was to have attempted the offensive against the Bulgarians and Germans whilst his attention was being attracted towards the south.

On May 6th, the British resumed their bombardment of the Bulgarian positions west of Lake Doiran, and on the night of the 8th-9th, the infantry attacked. The 60th, 22nd and 26th Divisions took part in the operations, but the principal effort was made by the latter between the Ravin des Jumeaux and the lake; to the left only demonstrative actions were to take place. The positions to the right and left of the Petit Couronné were captured at the cost of heavy lossess, a battalion of the Argyll and Sutherlands greatly distinguishing itself. Two detachments of the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry and the Berkshire Regiment assaulted the eastern end of the hill and ascended its slopes, but the violent machine-gun and



trench-mortar fire and the counter-attacks of the enemy rendered these positions untenable and they had to be evacuated. The British were unable to hold the captured trenches except in one or two sectors to the west of Krastali, where the enemy had offered no serious resistance. Their conduct throughout this action, as in that of the Ravin des Jumeaux, was admirable, but the losses were very heavy—from 4,000 to 5,000 men—and no advantage was gained.

On May 9th, the attack was also delivered in the Cerna loop. The plan of operations proposed by our Command was not, as we have seen, accepted by General Sarraill, who, after having studied the ground on which the action was to take place for one hour only, an inspection which he made from the summit of Mount Tchuka, he decided to deliver a frontal attack on the whole of Hill 1050 from point "A" to the Piton Rocheux. None of the Commanders who were to carry out this operation, Italian or French, had any confidence in its success. The attack was planned in order to make it coincide with that of the Serbs, but actually it did not do so. This fact, and the preliminary bombardment to destroy the wire entanglements and other defences of the enemy, which lasted for several days, gave the enemy ample warning as to the points at which the attack was to be delivered. The troops detailed for the operation were the 61st, 161st, and 162nd Italian Infantry detachments, with the 62nd in support, the 16th French Colonial Division and a Russian brigade. The artillery consisted of three French batteries of short 155-mm. guns, 7 French batteries of old naval guns of 120 mm. (long), 9 French field batteries of 75 mm., the 32 Italian mountain guns of 65 mm., and two groups (16 pieces) of 240 mm. Italian trench-mortars. But all this was insufficient to destroy the enemy defences. The destructive barrage was resumed with greater vigour, and at 6.30 the infantry attack began. On the left, the 1st Battalion of the 61st Regiment reached and passed beyond the enemy lines on the crest of Hill 1050 between points "A" and "A 2," but there it was met by very heavy rifle and machine-gun fire, suffered serious losses

and had to fall back on point "A 1," where it remained until evening. The 3rd Battalion recaptured the old trenches, lost by the Serbs after the fall of Monastir, to the south and south-east of point "A" and went beyond them, but were attacked in the flank as well as in front by the enemy fire; they had to fall back after having suffered heavy losses, including the Battalion Commander, who was mortally wounded. In the centre, a detachment of the 161st succeeded in getting round Hill 1050 on the right, whilst others in the centre and on the left reached points "A 2" and "A 3." These troops were also subjected to very heavy artillery, trench-mortar and machine-gun fire, were counter-attacked by strong detachments of the enemy, and suffered serious losses. One company was almost completely destroyed by the explosion of a mine which had been laid in the trench from which the enemy had been driven. Nevertheless the few survivors advanced with great energy and surprised the enemy in their dug-outs, capturing many German prisoners and killing others. But the fire from the battery positions which our artillery could not silence, rendered their position untenable, and they, too, had to fall back on their original trenches, which in the meanwhile had been wrecked by the enemy bombardment. On the right, the attack by the 162nd Regiment encountered the same fate as the others. Our men succeeded in their first dash in occupying the whole of the enemy's first line on the Piton Brûlé, on to which they also carried their machine-guns. Then perhaps they might have been able to hold their ground, but support failed them on the right, because even the troops of the 16th French Colonial Division had been unable to maintain themselves on the Piton Rocheux which they had at first captured, so that the Italians were met by a very heavy artillery, machine-gun and hand-grenade fire from behind, and by machine-gun fire on their right coming from the Piton Rocheux. They were thus obliged to fall back, partly on their own trenches and partly on positions between the old and the new trenches. At 9.45, the attack was resumed, but conditions not having improved in our favour, no better success was

achieved, whereas fresh heavy losses were suffered. About midday the order to suspend the attack was given. Altogether we had lost about 2,700 men killed and wounded. The troops had behaved splendidly, and perhaps they might have broken through on the right if, as I have said, the support from the Rocheux sector, where the French had been unable to reach the ridge, had not failed them.

On the following day a new attack was ordered. As the French Command had realized that the artillery at its disposal was not sufficient for a general attack along the whole line, a fact which the Italians had known for some time, it was decided to concentrate the whole of it on the Piton Brûlé and the Piton Rocheux. At 5 a.m. a demonstrative bombardment was commenced on Hill 1050, and a concentrated fire on the Brûlé and Rocheux from the Italian and French batteries further east. At 8 a.m. the range was lengthened, and the infantry (161st Regiment) began the attack, but they were met by the usual hurricane of enemy fire which held up the advance. As early as 7.30, our Command had noticed a diminution in the intensity of the artillery fire against the Rocheux, and in answer to a question by telephone, the French Command replied that the bombardment was merely a feint because the attack had been adjourned to the following day. The explanation was afterwards given that, as everybody at the French H.Q. knew of this adjournment, nobody had thought of communicating it to our Command. The batteries were immediately ordered to cease fire and the two attacking battalions to remain in their trenches; the battalion on the right suspended its advance, but the one on the left, the telephone having been destroyed by the enemy bombardment, could not be warned in time, and attacked impetuously, reached the enemy trenches and occupied them, but found itself without support, because the battalion on the right and the French had not moved, and consequently it had to retire with heavy losses.

On the 11th the attack was repeated in identical conditions, but the enemy fire made any advance impossible, and the troops fell back on the trenches whence they had

started. A detachment of Italian infantry which had pushed further forward remained under a rocky ridge the whole day, the men shamming dead because they could not raise their heads, and re-entered our lines after nightfall. The French attack was no more successful. Our total losses were 3,000 men—those of the French about the same.

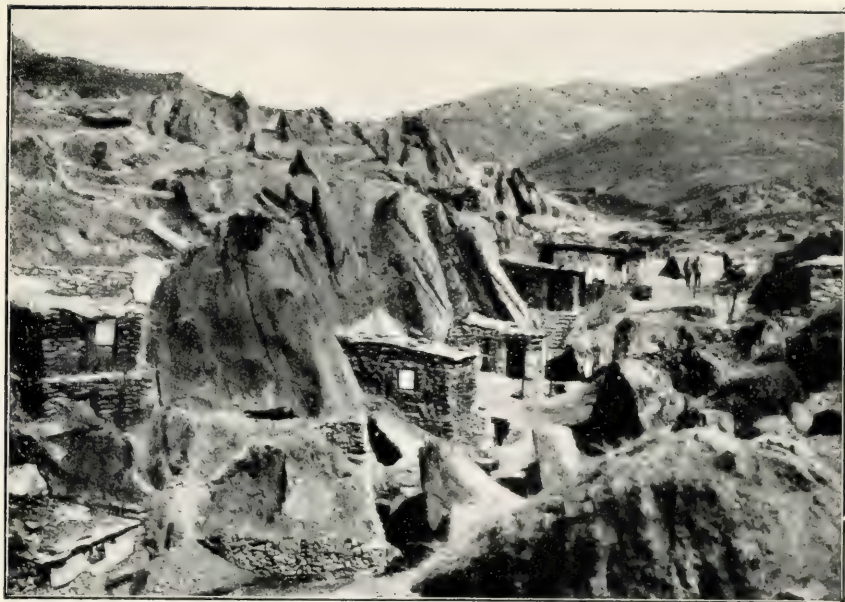
In the meanwhile, the II Serbian Army had attacked Hill 1824, south of the Dobropolje on May 9th, capturing it with small losses, and prepared to attack Vetrenik. But after some operations of slight importance, in which a little progress was made, the Serbs too, on account of the enemy resistance and the bad weather, were held up, having lost about 1,000 men, and the Serbian Command asked the C.A.A. to suspend the offensive. General Sarraill attributes this request to various causes, among which was the fear of the Prince Regent of a movement among the Serbs similar to that which was taking place among the Russians, to the reaction of events on the Western front, and to the failure and losses on other sectors of the Macedonian front, but chiefly to the crisis in the internal political situation of the Serbs, and to the intrigues of the French General Lebouc, commanding the French troops in the Cerna loop, who, being unable to aspire to the post of Commander-in-Chief on account of his inferior rank, had tried, according to General Sarraill, to get the Prince Regent of Serbia appointed to that post in the place of General Sarraill in order to become his "Major Général." There was some truth in all this, but the chief cause of the reluctance of the Prince Regent to continue the offensive was, as usual, lack of confidence on the part of the Serbs in the strategic qualities of Sarraill, and the fear of incurring useless losses which could not be made good.

Further to the right, the I Group of Divisions, commanded by General Régnauld, and composed of the 122nd French Division, the Greek Archipelago Division (2 Regiments), and a Russian brigade commanded by General Dietrich, had begun to explore the ground as early as May 5th, and on the 10th it advanced a little. On the Struma the British



attacked on the 15th and captured a few prisoners, and on the 16th and 18th they repulsed Bulgarian counter-attacks, inflicting losses on the enemy. A few sporadic actions were conducted on various sectors of the front, and on the 21st General Sarrail ordered the French and British battalions to suspend all attacks, and on the 23rd he extended the same order to the Serbs. The final result of these and other operations, the losses in which were about 13,000 to 14,000, was absolutely nil. A few enemy trenches had been captured, but no positions which could in any way improve the situation of the Allies. The moral situation of the latter had suffered considerably, both on account of the depression caused by the unsuccessful attacks and of the heavy losses, and above all, owing to the encouragement of the Bulgarians and Germans. Until that moment the enemy *moral* had been declining as a consequence of the long period of inaction after their defeat in the autumn of 1916, the pressure of the Allies, and the conviction that, whatever was the outcome of the war, the Bulgarians would obtain but slight advantages besides those already achieved, even if the latter could be preserved in their entirety. The possibility of a separate peace was not excluded. Now, however, victory—the unsuccessful offensive of the Allies appeared a victory to them—strengthened their determination to carry on the war to the bitter end.

The reasons for the failure are various. In the first place, the enemy, with their successive lines of trenches, well defended by barbed wire, with dug-outs excavated in the rock, and their great abundance of artillery and machine guns, occupied everywhere the dominating positions. Their artillery was more numerous and included heavier calibres than that of the Allies. On the other hand, the Allied effectives, weakened by sickness, the gaps not being filled up by adequate reinforcements, were inferior to those of the enemy. The Allied Air Force was also inferior, as it was not provided with machines capable of facing the swift and powerful German Gothas. But the chief cause of the failure must be set down to the absolute deficiency of the Chief Command. General Sarrail was



CAMP UNDER THE PITON BRÛLÉ.



ITALIAN NATIONAL FESTIVAL (THE STATUTO) AT SAKULEVO. HIGH MASS.



peculiarly unsuited to hold a command over troops of different nationalities on account of his lack of tact and consideration in dealing with the various commanders, nor did he possess the true qualities of a commander of a large unit. He lacked clearness of vision and genius in his strategic ideas, and firmness in carrying them out. He always affected great contempt for the enemy forces, he acted on sudden decisions taken almost at haphazard and without sufficient knowledge of the topographical and military situation. As we have seen, he had decided on the plan of operations in the Cerna loop after a flying visit to Mount Tehuka, and adopted one very different from that elaborated by our Command after a residence of nearly six months in that sector. Nor would he listen to Voivod Michich, who knew more about Balkan mountain warfare than most generals. He had no idea of the methods of liaison, and instead of carrying out the operations in the various sectors simultaneously, or else concentrating all his efforts on one sector, he ordered a series of disconnected actions, carried out at different moments; he began the attack between Lakes Ochrida and Presba and that opposite Monastir in the month of March, he attacked with the British west on Lake Doiran on April 25th, and in May he conducted four attacks on as many sectors—with the French and Italians in the Cerna loop, with the Serbs east of the Cerna, with the French, Russians and Greeks west of the Vardar, and with the French and British east of the Vardar, dispersing the artillery so that in no sector was there a sufficiency of heavy and medium calibres to make an impression on the extremely strong defensive lines of the enemy or silence their batteries. He allowed each contingent to act on its own account, without ever letting the guiding hand of the Commander-in-Chief be felt, save occasionally in exceptional circumstances, and at moments when it was out of place. Apart from all this, while the Allied effectives were too weak for a serious offensive, he would not concentrate them all at the front, but withdrew 3 divisions to keep themselves ready to operate in Greece. The lack of confidence on the part of the Allies, and even of a considerable section of the French, in his military qualities



was thus very much enhanced, because he was seen to be always preoccupied by political questions, and those not of inter-Allied policy. If the Greek situation was such as to require the intervention of the Armée d'Orient, he should not have attempted an offensive against the Germans and Bulgarians at that moment.<sup>1</sup>

If the enemy had thought of conducting a counter-attack, after the unsuccessful attack by the Allies and the consequent reduction of their strengths, in addition to that occasioned by the withdrawal of troops to be sent to Greece, a disaster to the entire Armée d'Orient would not have been impossible. If it did not take place, this was certainly not due to the merits of the Commander-in-Chief.

<sup>1</sup> General Sarraïl in his memoirs tries to defend himself by publishing the orders of the French Government, which enjoined on him now an action in Greece, now an offensive on the front ; but he does not appear to have put the question in clear language—either one thing or the other ; if one was to be carried out he must have no *arrière pensée* for the other.

## CHAPTER VIII

### GREEK AFFAIRS

WE have already seen what difficulties and anxieties were inflicted on the Allied armies by the attitude of Greece. The surrender of Rupel and of the IV Greek Army Corps aroused a strong reaction in a part of Greek public opinion—that part which still supported Venizelos in his pro-Entente policy. As early as February, 1916, General Sarrail had gone to Athens to try to induce the King and the Government to alter their policy, at all events in the sense of a benevolent neutrality. He received the impression that the King wished to remain neutral at all costs, that the Premier, M. Skouloudis, and the General Staff were frankly pro-German, and that Venizelos still hoped for the intervention of Greece on the side of the Allies; Venizelos, however, stated that it would be necessary to reconstitute and re-equip the whole army before it could take the field. After the treachery of Rupel, the situation became more critical, and a sort of Committee of Public Safety was created at Salonica for the defence of the nation's interests and honour. Sarrail did not interfere with the movement, but was sceptical as to its success.

In June, the Powers seemed at last inclined to take strong measures against the Athens Government. Venizelists were being constantly arrested in Greece and the Allies insulted, so that a naval demonstration was decided on, together with the landing of a strong contingent of Allied troops to be sent from Salonica. But Britain and France were not in absolute agreement as to the line of action to be taken, while both Governments hesitated before deciding on measures capable of provoking an open rupture and of driving Greece definitely into the arms of

the Central Empires. Nor was there complete understanding between General Sarrail and the French Admiral, Dartige du Fournet, as each of them wished to have the operations under his own control. But when the troops were embarked at Salonica and ready to sail for the Piræus, M. Skouloudis resigned (June 20th), and was succeeded by M. Zaïmis, a statesman apparently more favourable to the Entente; the King thereupon accepted the Allies' Note demanding the demobilization of part of the army, the withdrawal of all Greek troops from Macedonia and Thessaly, and the cession to the Allies of the fleet and a certain amount of war material—with the firm intention of doing nothing of the kind. The expedition was therefore suspended.

In August, 1916, Venizelos was already contemplating a revolutionary movement at Salonica, under the protection of the Allies, but he did not yet dare to act, hesitating at the thought of provoking civil war. His followers were bolder, and on August 30th an insurrection against the Athens Government broke out, under the leadership of Colonels Zimbrakakis and Mazarakis, the ex-Prefect Argyropoulo and M. Tsanas. The gendarmerie and the artillery joined the insurgents, whereas the infantry, commanded by Colonel Tricoupis, Chief of the Staff of the III Corps, remained faithful to the King. There were some encounters on the Place d'Armes, near the barracks, and General Sarrail seized the occasion to order the immediate evacuation of Salonica by the Royalist troops, "to liberate Macedonia from all armed forces who were vassals of Germany."<sup>1</sup> The Committee of Public Safety, with the assent of Sarrail, took possession of the administration, and Colonel Zimbrakakis summoned Venizelos to Salonica. The latter arrived on September 9th, unhindered by the Royal Government. According to General Sarrail, with whom other observers are also in agreement on this point, there was a tacit understanding between Constantine and Venizelos. There is, however, no proof of it, and the personal hostility which had long existed between the two seems to incompatible with such a supposition. But it is

<sup>1</sup> Sarrail, "La Grèce Vénizéliste," *Revue de Paris*, December 15, 1919.

certain that with the arrival of Venizelos at Salonica that city was secured for Greece, whatever the outcome of the war might be, and with Salonica the future of the kingdom was also assured. If the Central Empires won, King Constantine might count, owing to his anti-Entente policy, on their benevolence, whereas if the Allies won Venizelos might claim anything of them. If Constantine had been a little more astute he might have taken advantage of this curious situation, in his own interest.

Venizelos, with General Danglis and Admiral Coundouriotis, constituted a "triumvirate" which assumed authority under the name of "Provisional Government of National Defence." Its rule was limited to Greek Macedonia (except the territories beyond the Struma occupied by the Bulgarians and Germans), Crete and the other islands of the Archipelago. Even in those territories the new Government had many adversaries, and without the support of the *Armée d'Orient* and of the Allied fleets it would have been unable to hold its own, because its professedly interventionist attitude was not very popular. Epirus, the Greeks of Koritza, and Thessaly hesitated, and Sarraïl, in order to avoid conflicts between Greeks, created the so-called Neutral Zone between Macedonia and Thessaly. This territory was never violated, a fact which proved advantageous to King Constantine, as it prevented the penetration of Venizelist elements into the kingdom.

Venizelos at once set to work to raise an army capable of fighting by the side of the Allies in Macedonia. It was a case not only of creating an army out of nothing, but also of rehabilitating Greece from the discredit which the ambiguous policy of the King, her intriguing politicians, and the inadequate sense of dignity and lack of political instinct of a great part of the army and of the people, had cast on her. Deserted as he was by almost everyone in Greece, the undertaking seemed well nigh impossible, and the fact that he succeeded at all is a proof of his eminent qualities as well as of un hoped for good luck.

On September 22, 1916, a first Greek battalion was formed and sent to the Struma incorporated in a French unit under



a British Command. On November 14th it was joined by two more battalions, and thus the first regiment was formed. In March, 1917, two more regiments were created, and the three constituted a division which was called the Serres Division, because the first nucleus was formed of men belonging to the old Serres Division who had escaped after the surrender of the IV Corps. During the spring, drafts from the islands arrived and were formed into a second division—that of the Archipelago, and some months later the Cretan Division also arrived. The three divisions were welded into an Army Corps, known as the National Defence Army Corps; this was in fact the National Defence Army, commanded by General Zimbrakakis (whom we have seen as Colonel).<sup>1</sup> Immense efforts had been necessary to achieve this result. In Macedonia, real Greeks were few, and not all of them very keen on intervention; the other elements of the population were decidedly opposed to it, or, like the Turks, openly pro-German. Everybody did their best to evade military service, with such pretexts as commerce, work necessary for the Allied armies, propaganda, or the production of documents and certificates of some neutral nationality acquired with lightning speed.

The National Defence Government had to resort to every kind of violence to raise even a few volunteers. General Sarraïl has published in the article already quoted a series of telegrams from that Government to the local authorities in the various territories which had recognized Venizelos containing very stringent instructions to force the inhabitants to join the colours.<sup>2</sup>

But in any case this Government had to be considered an ally; France and Britain recognized it officially and sent diplomatic agents to Salonica as their representatives, although they did not break off relations with the Athens Government. Italy never recognized the new Govern-

<sup>1</sup> The regiments of this force were numbered from 1 to 9, but they were always described as National Defence Regiments, to distinguish them from regiments of the regular army having the same numbers.

<sup>2</sup> The authorities in the island of Samos were instructed to promise land in Asia Minor to all volunteers, and if that was not enough "a reign of terror must be established" (Sarraïl, *ibid.*).



HILL 1075. ARTILLERY CAMP.



ARTILLERY O.P.



ment, a fact which was the cause of disagreement between us and our Allies. The Greeks of both persuasions did not fail to take advantage of this lack of unity in the Allies' policy, and incidents between them and all the Allies were by no means infrequent. The Salonica Venizelists were particularly incensed against us. Their Press did not scruple to attack us in the most violent and coarsest manner, circulating the most idiotic libels, such as the statement that the Italian Government was starving the inhabitants of the Dodecanese to death, when it was notorious that it was feeding them and selling them food below cost price, so that prices were lower in those islands than in Italy. A more serious incident was the absolutely unprovoked murder, by a Greek sergeant, of two unarmed Italian soldiers of the Territorial Militia while they were washing clothes in a stream. The assassin was discovered and arrested by our *carabinieri* and handed over to the Greek authorities for punishment. The Greek court acquitted him and the Public Prosecutor actually exalted him as a hero! The British, too, were irritated against the Greeks, and even the French, who protected them officially, in private conversation expressed the greatest contempt for them. General Sarraïl states that, as soon as it had been recognized by France and Britain, the National Defence Government tried to revive a number of old claims for preposterous indemnities demanded by Salonica natives for requisitions or doubtful damages. The Finance Minister at one moment had even decreed that the State Treasury was to refuse French bank notes, so that the C.A.A. had to buy drachmæ at the rate of 80 for 100 francs, even when the money was to be spent for the Venizelist Army.

On September 11th the Zaïmis Cabinet, which was moderately pro-Entente, fell and was succeeded by that of M. Kalogheropoulo, but as the Allies refused to treat with the latter, it too fell on October 4th. Professor Lambros then became Premier, with a frankly anti-Ally policy, and thus we come to the catastrophe of December 1st. The Greek Government, after having undertaken to withdraw the troops from Thessaly and to hand over



the fleet and war material, failed to do so. After endless shuffling, the Allied fleets were sent to the Piræus and a policy of coercion was decided on. As a pledge for the cession of war material, the Government was to hand over 10 mountain batteries at once. Admiral Dartige had certain strategic points in Athens and the road between the capital and the Piræus occupied by detachments of French seamen with machine guns. Then he went himself to Athens, and communicated his plan of operations to the King.<sup>1</sup> Suddenly there was a general burst of rifle fire. The detachment at the Zappeion and those along the Athens-Piræus road were surrounded by Greek soldiers, as were also the Allied legations. The French seamen had fallen into a regular ambush, and 200 of them were killed. Admiral Dartige and several detachments of seamen were taken prisoners and escorted to the Piræus. Both he and the Foreign Ministers then agreed to accept six batteries instead of ten, while the rest of the material was to be handed over on December 15th.

General Sarrail received the most contradictory instructions (which he quotes textually in his memoirs). Whereas the French G.H.Q. and the Government ordered him to take the military measures necessary to re-establish the prestige of the Entente in Greece and sent out the 16th Colonial Division, which he was to reinforce with other troops from Salonica, the French Minister at Athens and Admiral Dartige, anxious for the safety of the foreign colonies, insisted on nothing being done. Sarrail himself wanted to take action, occupying various strategic points in Greece and blowing up the railway bridges at Corinth and Lamia. The French Government had entrusted General Sarrail with the conduct of the operations to be carried out in Greece, but Admiral Dartige had held back the 16th Division. The British and Italian Governments were adverse to any energetic action against King Constantine because, in view of the general military situation and of that on the Macedonian front in particular, they thought that it would be dangerous to *brusquer les choses*. Thus, while the Greek Government had suppressed

<sup>1</sup> Sarrail, *Mon Commandement en Orient*. p. 194.

all the Allied controls, the Athens wireless station began to communicate with Sofia once more, and the Venizelists were subjected to the most ferocious persecution, the Allies presented a fresh ultimatum to Greece (these documents now came to be called *pen*-ultimatums) on December 14th, demanding merely the withdrawal of the troops from Thessaly, without mentioning the cession of war material or claiming any satisfaction for the massacre of December 1st. The Greek Government accepted without hesitation, and the 16th Colonial Division departed for Salonica.

These events undoubtedly weakened the prestige of the Entente in the East, because it was clearly seen that the Allies were by no means agreed as to the policy to be followed and that they dare not take strong measures. This consequently strengthened King Constantine and the pro-German and neutralist elements. The only thing that the Allies did decide to do was to impose a blockade on Greece, which aroused great irritation against them without being sufficient to reduce the Athens Government to obedience. At the Rome Conference in January, 1917, at which General Sarraïl had been present, although little attention was paid to him, no conclusion concerning Greece was arrived at, except that of doing nothing for the present. But the situation at Athens rendered that of the Armée d'Orient ever more difficult, and it was necessary to find some solution for the former if the Macedonian front were to be made safe. The Greek Government, although it had withdrawn its troops from Thessaly, left many officers and strong detachments of *gendarmerie* there, which might serve as cadres for the reservists. From the Peloponnese many soldiers were allowed to go to Thessaly on leave. Whereas at Athens provisions were lacking, they were being concentrated in abundance in the north; every now and then the control officers, who had been re-established, found arms and ammunition depots. Bands, comprising soldiers and reservists, were also formed.<sup>1</sup> It was to oppose these

<sup>1</sup> Telegrams sent by General Sarraïl between January and May, 1917 (Sarrai, *op. cit.* pp. 231-32).

bands and to prevent them from penetrating into the Neutral Zone that General Sarrail sent detachments to Kozani and Grevena. But the Greek question continued to provoke inter-Allied incidents; according to Sarrail, General Phillips, the Chief of the British Military Mission in Greece, tried to minimize the importance of the trickery and chicanes of the Greeks; even two French officers supported King Constantine—General Bousquier, Chief of the French Military Mission at Athens, and General Baumann at Corfu (always according to the French C.-in-C.).

The Greeks at Salonica having assumed a truculent attitude towards ourselves, the Italian troops received orders that, while they were to avoid giving rise to any incidents, they were to ensure respect for the Italian name and uniform. An Italian soldier who, having been insulted without the slightest provocation by a Greek, gave him a sound thrashing, received an encomium and a reward. General Petitti, in accordance with instructions from his own Government, did not recognize the National Defence Government in any way, and merely exchanged visiting cards with M. Venizelos, to whom he had been introduced by the Italian Consul. But he refused to allow forced recruiting for the National Defence Army among the inhabitants of the Italian area in the Krusha Balkan. Subsequently our Command agreed that the native labourers in our employ, if subject to military service, should be exchanged with others who were exempt from such duties. Colonel Bodrero, commanding the Italian garrison at Salonica, was, however, on terms of friendship with M. Venizelos, and saw him often. He also assisted at a religious ceremony of a political Venizelist character at Santa Sofia, at a moment when it was reported that Italy was about to recognize the Provisional Government. But nothing came of these *avances*.

Finally, in April, the Powers decided to occupy Thessaly, and General Sarrail received instructions to keep himself in readiness for the operation, but the date was not yet fixed. He was then ordered to proceed to Thessaly after the offensive in Macedonia, scheduled for May, had been

carried out. At first the intention was merely to secure the harvest in Thessaly, both because it would be useful for the Armée d'Orient, and because it would render the blockade of Greece more effective. But Sarraïl wished to go much further; he actually proposed to upset King Constantine and establish a republic in Greece with Venizelos as President. To this, however, both Britain and Italy raised strong objection; two monarchies were certainly not going to co-operate in upsetting another one, especially in view of the Russian situation. After protracted discussions, it was agreed that Constantine should be forced to abdicate, and that his son Prince Alexander should be placed on the throne, with Venizelos as Prime Minister. The conduct of the Allied action in Greece was entrusted to M. Jonnart, former Governor-General of Algeria, as High Commissioner for the Entente. Even Sarraïl was placed under his orders, which did not please the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief in the Orient. On June 3rd he sent a detailed report on the situation to M. Jonnart, to whom he submitted the plan of operations which he proposed to execute. On the 6th, Jonnart reached Salonica to make his final arrangements with Sarraïl and Venizelos. In order to avoid any possibility of resistance on the part of King Constantine, it was decided to occupy simultaneously Thessaly to secure the harvest, the Isthmus of Corinth to prevent the troops in the Peloponnesus, who were faithful to the King, from entering Continental Greece, and the Piræus with a view to advancing on Athens and forcing the King to abdicate.

M. Jonnart immediately left for the Piræus. On June 8th, a French column commanded by General Venel advanced across the Neutral Zone into Thessaly, while a Franco-British-Russian force, commanded by General Régnauld, embarked for the Piræus and the Isthmus of Corinth. In Thessaly there was no resistance, except at Larissa, where a Greek regiment opened fire on the French cavalry, but was soon reduced to impotence. On the 10th, M. Jonnart, who had established his quarters on board the French battleship *Justice*, had a meeting with M. Zaïmis, the new Greek Premier. The Isthmus of Corinth was



occupied, and the ships conveying the troops destined for Athens were anchored off the Piræus. On the 11th, Jonnart, in the name of the Protecting Powers of Greece (France, Britain and Russia), sent an ultimatum to Zaïmis, in which the abdication of King Constantine was demanded, in order that Constitutional Government might be re-established in the country, as the Constitution had been violated by the illegal dissolution of the Chamber; the King himself was invited to choose his successor, who, however, was not to be the Diadoch on account of his notoriously anti-German sentiments. A reply was demanded within twenty-four hours. Constantine now realized that all resistance was useless—his own capital was within range of the guns of the fleet, and troops were ready to land at the Piræus. That same evening M. Zaïmis informed M. Jonnart that the ultimatum had been accepted unconditionally, and on the 12th he sent him the official reply of the Greek Government to the same effect. When the news of the King's abdication became known in the city, there were some demonstrations in his favour; but the landing of the French and Russian troops (the British were at Corinth) removed all danger of a rising. In order to preclude any contact with the population and to draw off the attention of the crowd, some empty Royal motor cars, with the blinds down, issued from the main entrance of the Palace and drove towards the Zappeion, while the King and his family departed secretly at about 17 hrs. in the direction of the Royal villa of Tatoï, and thence proceeded to the little port of Oropos in the Eubœa Channel, where they embarked on the Royal yacht *Sphacteria*. Together with another vessel for the suite and the baggage, and escorted by two French destroyers, the *Sphacteria* sailed for Italy, whence the ex-King and his family went into exile in Switzerland.

In the meanwhile Prince Alexander, Constantine's second son, who had been designated as successor, had taken the oath of allegiance to the Constitution. M. Jonnart then published a proclamation to the Greek people, announcing the raising of the blockade, the re-establishment of good relations between the Protecting Powers and

Greece, and the imminent restoration of national unity. After a conversation with M. Jonnart, M. Zaïmis ordered the expulsion from Greece of a certain number of personages implicated in Constantine's policy, including the ex-Premiers Gounaris, Skouloudis and Lambros, six other Ministers, General Dousmanis and another General, Colonel Metaxas, Assistant Chief of the Staff, and Admiral Hösslin, the head of the German propaganda service and several others—in all 160 people. Immediately after ascending the throne, King Alexander announced in a proclamation to the people that "he would follow in the glorious footsteps of his father," which was not exactly what was desired, and the phrase had a somewhat disconcerting effect. But he corrected this *faux pas* directly after in a letter to M. Zaïmis in which he promised faithfully to respect the Constitution and declared himself ready to co-operate with the Protecting Powers for the pacification of public feeling and the reconciliation of the country (June 20th).

On the 21st the delegates of M. Venizelos met those of M. Zaïmis, and M. Venizelos himself arrived at Salamis, where he had a conversation with M. Jonnart on board the *Justice*. It was then decided to re-convoke the Chamber elected in 1915, in which the majority was Venizelist and had been illegally dissolved by Constantine. King Alexander having agreed to send for Venizelos, Zaïmis resigned (June 27th), and Venizelos re-entered Athens under the protection of French troops who had occupied all the strategic positions in the city, and of 400 Cretan gendarmes. The new Cabinet comprised Venizelos himself as Premier and Minister of War, Politis, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Repoulis (Interior), Admiral Coundouriotis (Marine), Empiricos (Communications), etc. Jonnart had authorized Venizelos to modify certain points of the Constitution and to suspend the permanency of the judiciary, so as to cleanse the State of Royalist<sup>1</sup> officials. The process was carried out without excessive squeamishness.

<sup>1</sup> Although the Monarchy was maintained in Greece, the word "Royalist" came to be applied exclusively to followers of the ex-King; his opponents were described as Venizelists or Liberals.

Many officials, magistrates and officers were dismissed; the trials and convictions for political offences, and the sentences of deportation or exile were innumerable. The population, which had attacked the Venizelists after December 1st with the utmost ferocity, and with the complicity or the help of the authorities had committed the most diabolical cruelties against them, accepted the new regime without resistance, if without enthusiasm. There was still a strong Royalist party, comprising almost the whole of the upper class and a great part of the officers. But its chiefs having been arrested or deported, it was in no position to offer any resistance. The mass of the people, although less enthusiastic about Constantine than the higher classes, was hostile to Venizelos because he represented war, and they had no wish to fight. But there was also an ardently Venizelist minority, comprising some of the best elements of the country, who saw beyond mean party struggles and immediate material interests. It was this group which, with support of the Allies, ended by triumphing.

Thus the National Defence Government came to an end, and Greece was once more united. In Italy, the Greek situation was never fully understood, nor the inner meaning of these events. For some time before the great war Italo-Greek relations had been unfriendly on account of the Dodecanese question and our interests in Albania. Italian public opinion had defended Albanian independence, whereas Greece aspired to annex the southern part of the country, including Argyrocastro and Koritza which Greeks described as "Northern Epirus." During the Balkan War the Greeks had occupied Epirus and South Albania, but later they had had to evacuate the latter territory; on the outbreak of the Great War they invaded it again and devastated it. The feelings of Greece towards the Entente were uncertain; our intervention rendered her somewhat hostile because she did not, for the above-mentioned reasons, wish to find herself in alliance with Italy.<sup>1</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> By the terms of the Treaty of London (April 26, 1915), Italy undertook, if a small neutral Albanian State were created, not to oppose Greek claims over South Albania and those of Serbia and Montenegro over



insolent and petulant attitude of the Greek press intensified anti-Greek feeling in Italy. Greece's failure to meet her engagements arising from the Serbo-Greek Alliance, and later her whole attitude towards the Allies in Macedonia, culminating in the surrender of Rupel and the IV Army Corps, convinced Italian public opinion that the great majority of the Greek people were pro-German. On the other hand we were suspicious of Venizelos because he represented the Imperialist spirit of unlimited Greek expansion, and Italians did not believe that Greek Imperialism had a sound basis, because they considered that the Greeks lacked the qualities required in a race destined to rule. But in Italy it was not perhaps understood that Venizelos himself was a much bigger man than the *milieu* in which his activity was displayed, and that he was in reality rendering services to the Entente and therefore to us. In Britain and France, on the other hand, public opinion wrongly believed that he had his people absolutely behind him and that that people was, as a whole, up to his standard.

The real reason why Britain and France, especially the latter, desired Greek intervention in the war and therefore supported Venizelos, was that a hostile Greece might prove fatal to the Macedonian expedition. If Greece were really neutral the Armée d'Orient might hold its own on its positions, but a new offensive could only be attempted with any hope of success if fresh reinforcements were forthcoming. These might have been drawn from the French front or from Italy; but the British, French and Italian G.H.Q.'s were irremovably opposed to the sending of more troops from what were regarded as the essential fronts to the East. The Serbs were not even able to fill up the gaps caused by battle and sickness. The only source of supply for man-power which could

the northern districts, if she was given Valona and all the Adriatic territories which she claimed, including Northern Dalmatia. Italy was to direct Albania's foreign policy. But the general trend of public opinion was in favour of a completely independent Albania, and the clauses of the Treaty providing for the partition of Albania were eventually dropped. The general object of Italian policy had been to prevent the Albanian coast from being occupied by a potentially hostile Power.



still be tapped was Greece. No one really wanted Greek assistance—neither the French nor the British, and still less the Italians and the Serbs. Everybody knew that the Greek Army was torn by political strife, disorganized, lacking in artillery and equipment, badly led and anything but friendly to the Entente, and that it could not therefore represent an important addition of strength to the Allies. There were, it is true, the three National Defence Divisions which included good material, and the officers at least were all volunteers. But they were only nine regiments in all, with a few mountain batteries. There was therefore nothing else to be done but to get the whole of Greece, *nolens volens*, into the war, and trust to the Allied military missions and to a vast cleansing operation to make something useful out of the Greek Army. It would certainly have been preferable if a few already war-trained divisions from France or Italy had been available. But the Government of the Great Powers were not friendly towards the Macedonian campaign, and would not realize that 3 or 4 divisions, withdrawn from the fronts of Italy or France would not have weakened those armies perceptibly, whereas in Macedonia they might have just tilted the balance in our favour. But as this course was rejected it was necessary to have recourse to Greece, a necessity which was not understood in Italy. We did not desire Greek intervention because we knew what enormous demands for compensation Greece would afterwards make, demands which were to some extent incompatible with our own interests. But on the other hand we were even more opposed than the French or the British to the sending of fresh troops to Macedonia. The only other solution was to withdraw the Armée d'Orient altogether, or let it be starved for men and remain in idleness, with the ever-present risk of being driven into the sea by the enemy. France and Britain, who attached a little more importance than we did—though not very much more—to the Macedonian expedition, finally decided to apply for Greek help, trusting in Venizelos. Italy, in her opposition to the vast aspirations of Venizelist Greece, had the appearance of supporting Constantine, and this did us a great deal of

harm. We had, perhaps, interests to defend in the Near East which were to some extent in contrast with those of other Allies. But in order to defend them adequately we should have done nothing to make our policy appear in any way suspected of pro-Germanism—and at that time to be pro-Constantine was regarded as equivalent to being pro-German. Instead, Italian public opinion and the press, and some of our officers and diplomats assumed an attitude which made our Near Eastern policy suspect in the eyes of the French, and even of the British. We continued to suffer the great harm which these circumstances caused us for a long time afterwards, especially at the Peace Conference. Moreover, our pro-Constantine policy did not succeed. France and Britain brought about Constantine's fall and the return of Venizelos. We limited ourselves to occupying Epirus for a short time, as a *pendant* to the French occupation of Thessaly; we made ourselves still more unpopular with the Venizelists, without gaining the sympathies of the Royalists. Our true policy should have been to send important reinforcements to the East. Had we done so we should have been, after the Armistice, in a far better position to defend our own aspirations and interests in the negotiations with our Allies.

Let us now see what the Greek Army really was. I have mentioned the National Defence Army Corps. This was the best that Greece could produce in the way of a military force, and subsequently, as we shall see, its regiments behaved well. But even their *moral* at first left something to be desired. Desertions were numerous, and when M. Jonnart arrived there had been no less than 700 of them in the Archipelago Division alone.<sup>1</sup> Up to that moment only a few Greek detachments had been sent to the front, and always incorporated in Allied units and on relatively quiet sectors. After the fall of Constantine, Greece entered into a state of war with the Central Empires, and the French set to work to reorganize the Greek Army so that it might co-operate effectively in Macedonia.

The task was no easy one. The first thing to be done

<sup>1</sup> Sarraïl, "La Grèce Vénizéliste," *Revue de Paris*, December 15, 1919.

was to proceed to the cleansing of the officers' corps. This was indispensable, because nearly all the Staff officers had studied in Germany and, like the great majority of field officers, were imbued with pro-German sentiments. But the result of this process was that the Army was left with hardly any Staff officers at all, and very few officers of superior rank. It thus became necessary to promote large numbers of uneducated junior officers and of still more ignorant N.C.O.'s. A hasty and intensive course of military training had to be imparted to all. Even the troops of the National Defence Army had but scanty notions of modern warfare, trenches, barbed wire, the scientific use of machine guns, hand grenades, camouflage, signalling, etc. As for their supply and transport services, they were even more defective, so that at first everything had to be provided and transported by the Allies, and the latter, even at the end of the campaign, had to supply the Greeks with most of their services. The experience which the Greeks had gained in the Balkan Wars was of no use whatever, in fact they were a hindrance rather than a help; the former had been, so to speak, retail wars, whereas this was a wholesale one. In the former, the armies were small and could live on the country, in the latter, not only were the armies much larger, but the country had been so completely devastated that it could supply practically nothing. The troops of the National Defence Corps were now no longer lacking in military spirit, but it was necessary to infuse it into those of the old regular army. The men on the whole were not bad, but most of the officers were inadequately trained, and it was indispensable to instil into all of them the conviction that intervention in the war was necessary for the salvation of Greece.

The chief difficulties which the French Military Mission found itself up against were Oriental indolence, scanty love of hard work, and dislike of discipline. At the front, even when they had fought well and successfully, the Greek soldiers did not want to tire themselves by digging trenches and strengthening their positions, so that they could not have held out against vigorous counter-attacks; consequently, after every successful attack, when an enemy



reaction was feared, the Greeks would be relieved by other troops. In the training courses the French instructors had to work themselves to death trying to persuade their pupils that discipline and military knowledge were indispensable. As one of these officers said to me: "*Ils ne nous détestent pas, mais il nous trouvent très gênant.*" On the other hand sporadic cases of indiscipline and mutiny were less alarming than they would have been in a European army, although they were serious enough in themselves. Greek detachments, while travelling towards the Macedonian front, were apt to disperse en route, because, if the men happened to be passing near their own homes, they could not resist the temptation of going to visit their families. There were graver cases of mutiny proper, especially at Lamia and Larissa, provoked by Royalist propagandists who spread catastrophic and fantastic rumours or appealed to the Royalist and neutralist sentiments with which a part of the army was imbued; this is not surprising in view of the violent political passions by which the Army was torn and of the fact that the men realized the war very slightly. Cases of desertion to the enemy, although not infrequent, were far less numerous than was commonly believed at Salonica. On the whole it must be admitted that the French Mission carried out its task as well as it was possible for it to do with the material which it had to handle. But superhuman patience was necessary, and we must not be surprised if French officers at times indulged in the most bitter and often unjustified diatribes against the Greeks.

The troops of the National Defence Corps were scattered about the various sectors of the front to complete their training under the ægis of French units. As their training progressed, they were incorporated into ever larger units, so that whereas at first each Greek company was placed between companies belonging to other armies, later they were grouped in battalions, then in regiments, and finally in divisions. For a time there was one Greek division on the Monastir front, and one with the I Group of Divisions west of the Vardar; later on, two were grouped together, and early in 1918, all three were united in the latter sector,



thus constituting a complete army corps. Until that moment the Greek Command was a Corps Command, under General Zimbrakakis, with its G.H.Q. at Salonica, and later at Boemitza, near front of the I Group. The latter, however, continued to be commanded by a French General—first General G  rome, and then General d'Anselme.

In the late autumn of 1917, detachments of the Greek Regular Army began to reach Salonica. Their training was divided into three periods—the first in Old Greece, the second at the training camp at Naresh, near Salonica, and the third in a quiet sector of the front. The last detachments did not reach Macedonia until the eve of the offensive of September, 1918. The 1st, 2nd and 13th Divisions composed the I Army Corps; the others were not embodied in corps until after the Armistice, but served under Allied units in different sectors. To the I Corps (Gen. Paraskevopoulo) was entrusted the lower Struma area in the summer of 1918, at first under the command of the British XVI Corps, and subsequently directly under the British G.H.Q.

After the revolution of June, 1917, General Danglis was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Greek Army. He was a good soldier, but rather old; when the bulk of the troops had been transferred to Macedonia he moved his own G.H.Q. from Athens to Salonica. Later on he was relieved of his Command, and succeeded by General Paraskevopoulo. But the Greek Chief Command never really operated, save as an administrative and disciplinary organ, because there never was a real Greek Army. There were divisions and even corps, but the effective Army Command was always French or British. The lines of communication, the commissariat, the *intendance* only existed in embryo. The mobilization had never been general from fear of provoking insurrections, and had to be effected gradually and partially; only the youngest classes were called to the colours, so that there was a lack of men for the rear services. The Greeks, like other Oriental peoples, were lacking in the sense of organization, and even as collaborators they were the despair of the British Q service which had to supply them. The Greek officers recognized it themselves openly, and said

that everything with which the British undertook to supply them arrived regularly, whereas the supplies for which the Greek *intendance* was responsible arrived with considerable delay or remained on the road. Another difficulty was the inveterate habit of the Greek soldier of selling his kit to civilians. The temptation was considerable, as the prices paid for these articles were very high, and there was a regular secret organization for such purchases, besides private transactions between friends or relations. The result was that certain units had to be re-equipped two or three times before they had marched a kilometre. The same thing happened at Salonica even among other Allied armies, but to a much smaller extent, and such cases were always severely punished at once.

But with all their faults we must not forget that the Greeks did give a useful contribution to the Macedonian campaign. As we shall see later, the units that had occasion to fight behaved well, and the great sobriety and endurance of the men proved valuable assets in country as difficult and as poor in resources as Macedonia. If their losses in the war were trifling in comparison with those of the other Allies, and even as a percentage of the total numbers engaged, their utility lay in having, to some extent, solved the crisis of effectives from which the Armée d'Orient was suffering so grievously and which, in view of the reluctance of Great Powers to send reinforcements to Macedonia, had seemed well nigh insoluble. By entrusting to the Greeks, as was done in the summer of 1918, the whole of the Struma front, which, although it was not one of the very difficult sectors, required, nevertheless, a considerable number of troops to hold on account of its extension, the concentration of British troops elsewhere was rendered possible.

The Greek front on the Struma was nothing else than the old front of the British XVI Corps, and was now held by the three divisions of the Greek I Corps. Three more divisions were with the I Groupement between Nonte and the Vardar under French command, and another division was placed under another French General in the Cerna loop on the eve of the offensive. The rest of the Greek

forces remained in reserve. The 9th Division, which was in Epirus, had originally been intended to co-operate with the Italian XVI Corps in Albania; but it was considered advisable to avoid contact between Italians and Greeks, and it was therefore sent to Macedonia in the summer of 1918, part of it being conveyed by sea via Salonica and the rest marching overland via Ersek and Koritza. During their passage through Albania the various units of that division were supplied, at General Franchet d'Espérey's request, by the Italian military authorities, and the latter is said to have stated that the greatest success of his whole career was to have induced the Italians to feed the Greeks!

## CHAPTER IX

### SALONICA AND THE WAY THITHER

SALONICA was undoubtedly the most curious of all the "war capitals," and no other was such a centre of contending claims and political intrigues. Its population is unlike that of any other city, and although most of the inhabitants took no active part in the war, all were deeply interested in its eventual results. The majority are Jews of Spanish origin, who had settled there after their expulsion from Spain in the fifteenth century, and they still speak a bastard Spanish dialect. The next element in importance are the Greeks, who have largely increased by immigration since the annexation of Southern Macedonia to Greece. There is also a considerable number of Turks and other Moslems, and smaller communities of Bulgars, Serbs, Albanians, Kutzo-Vlachs, Europeans of various nationalities, and even a few Americans.

The city is in a certain sense an island, for it is surrounded on three sides by an almost uninhabited country, and on the fourth by the sea. It cannot be said to belong naturally to any State or race in particular, and no population looks to it as a centre of intellectual development and culture. But it is extremely important for the trade of many lands, and has consequently been fiercely contested by many peoples throughout the ages. It is this fatal attraction that has made its history such a tragedy. P. Risal, the author of the only modern work on Salonica, has rightly called it "*La ville convoitée*." It is indeed better situated than any other in the Ægean; along the European shores of that sea it is half-way between the two extremities, at the head of the most sheltered gulf, at the outlet of the Vardar valley and consequently of the easiest road of



access to the fertile lands of the interior. As Professor Hogarth has stated,<sup>1</sup> the other ports which might compete with it are either blocked by mountain barriers or surrounded by unstable populations. Were it not for malaria, the backward civilization and the lack of safety of its immediate hinterland, Salonica might have become an important agricultural and perhaps even industrial centre, but the farming methods of the neighbouring territories are extremely primitive and industry is non-existent. Its radius of commercial action is considerable. It is easier to send goods from any part of Macedonia and even from parts of Albania and Epirus to Salonica than to the ports of Albania; even the upper reaches of the valleys of some of the tributaries of the Danube are reached more easily from Salonica than from the Black Sea ports. Salonica is the junction of the railways from Constantinople, Uskub and Belgrade, and Monastir and Athens.

Under the Turks, Salonica was the outlet for the trade of half the Balkan Peninsula, as it ought to be to-day. But the wars of 1912-13 drove the Turks from Macedonia and partitioned the hinterland among several States, so that Greek Salonica is but a short distance from the frontiers of Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania, and the customs barriers have placed artificial obstacles in the way of traffic. The Greek, the Serb, and the Bulgarian each aspired to the possession of Salonica, hoping, in their narrow Balkan mentality, to capture its trade and enjoy its advantages entirely for himself to the exclusion of his neighbours. None of them understood that the prosperity of Salonica was bound up with that of the interior as a whole and of all the peoples of the Peninsula, and that commercial restrictions to the advantage of one nation alone were bound to prove detrimental to all, the *non beati possidentes* included. The port cannot prosper unless trade comes to it unhampered from Monastir and Uskub, from Nish and Belgrade, from Kustendil, Sofia and Ochrida, and not merely from Verria, Florina and Serres. As a Greek port it will always be a poor thing, and the

<sup>1</sup> *The Nearer East*, by D. G. Hogarth, pp. 238-39.



THE GREEK NATIONAL FESTIVAL ON APRIL 7, 1917.

M. Venizelos leaving the Church of S. Sophia, Salonica.



KING ALEXANDER OF GREECE VISITS A FRENCH CAMP.



Piræus will never allow an appreciable portion, even of Greek trade, to be diverted to Salonica, so that in present circumstances it is destined to fall into decay. The same would happen if it were to become exclusively a Serb or Bulgarian port. By its nature it is essentially an international port, and it should be subjected to a special regime, such as will probably be applied to many other ports in the near future. It would in this way not only prosper, but also become a bond of union to conciliate, through commercial interest, States and peoples who now hate each other. Apart from political and administrative difficulties, a great deal of capital will have to be invested in the port to carry out important works to prevent it from being silted up by the Vardar, but the capital will not be available unless investors are first assured that trade will be attracted to the port and not driven away from it by political quarrels.

The climate of Salonica is not an ideal one. In summer the heat is intolerable, and the summer lasts from May to the end of September. For weeks on end the thermometer marks 40 degrees Centigrade in the shade. There is the sea, it is true, but the sea at Salonica does not contribute to render the heat more tolerable, and sea bathing is an arduous enterprise.

Distractions were neither very numerous nor particularly edifying. The hotels were bad and dear; before the fire there were some good but expensive restaurants, and after the fire a few of them were resuscitated. The local *Cercle de Thessalonique* was quite attractive before the fire, but afterwards it was transferred to smaller and more modest quarters. Naturally, during the war, the military element was absolutely predominant. Six armies were represented in the town, of whom three—the French, the British and the Serb—by very large contingents. The Italians were less numerous, and the Russians still fewer at first, ended by disappearing altogether, save for some derelict officers, whose behaviour was not exactly exemplary. The masters of the house—the Greeks—in the early days of the war, kept very much to themselves, being suspected by the Allies; then, after the arrival



of Venizelos, they made themselves more conspicuous, and finally, when Greece was again united and the army reconstituted, they spread all over the place. Never in any other city did one see such a collection of different uniforms as at Salonica during the war years. British khaki, Highland kilts, French *bleu horizon*, Italian *grigio-verde*, the Serbs in grey, the Greeks in uniforms combining features of all the others, Russians who invented their own, Colonials of various kinds—coal-black Sudanese, swarthy Algerians, yellow Tonkinese and Annamites, dignified Indians in imposing turbans. Of these various armies the French, the British, the Serbs, and afterwards the Greeks, had their respective G.H.Q.'s at Salonica, which to the outside observer meant chiefly innumerable officers and swift Staff cars. The French occupied a large, ugly, inconvenient building near the port; afterwards, while retaining that one for their Q services, they removed the *Etat Major de l'Avant* to a row of villas in the residential quarter, one of them the ex-Bulgarian Consulate. The British were scattered all over the town, but most of the offices of the General Staff, which had at first been spread over three or four villas, were concentrated in a huge building, formerly a hospital and orphanage, popularly known as the "War Office," far more commodious than the French quarters. The Serbs were modestly housed in the ex-Austrian Consulate and one or two other buildings, and the Greeks mostly in the large ex-Turkish barracks in the Place d'Armes. We were close to the Greeks in a group of small buildings, some of them constructed for the purpose by Italian soldiers. The Russians were in the Russian Consulate.

Military messes were of course a great feature of Salonica life. British messes were all small, and consequently numerous; they were usually installed in private houses where the members of the mess also resided, and they were more characteristically bits of England than the French or Italian messes were bits of Italy or France. The French and Italian messes were much larger—our Base mess comprised some forty or fifty officers. Our M.T. mess, to which I was attached, became essentially

the reception mess, as it was here that most foreign officers were invited; indeed in few places was the inter-Allied spirit more sedulously and agreeably cultivated.

The French created a military institution for which they deserve great credit—the Cercle Militaire. It was not, as its name implied, a real club, but a large military restaurant, intended primarily for French officers, but to which all Allied officers were admitted. Meals were good and cheap, while if one ordered a special dinner one could obtain all possible delicacies. Later, the British also instituted an Officers' Rest House, with a large but not very good restaurant, and many comfortable bedrooms reserved for officers who had come down from the front for a few days. Foreign officers were not admitted, except the liaison officers and guests.

Of the resorts open to the public there was one deserving special mention, though not quite in a eulogistic sense—the famous Tour Blanche, near the historic monument of that name. It was a large café and restaurant, with a theatre and concert hall, surrounded by a garden. At all times of the year it was much frequented, but particularly in summer. The meals were fair, the drinks bad, but sold at exorbitant prices, the performances less than mediocre, but the spectators themselves were the most interesting part of the show. The place was usually crammed, mostly with officers and soldiers. Even if the artistes had been Carusos or Tetrizzinis, not a note of their songs would have been heard on account of the uproarious shouting of the audience—a large part of which was obviously “the worse.” The Russians excelled in these Bacchanals, but the British were good seconds. A little trick of the Russians, which the French sometimes imitated, was to demolish the partitions between the boxes and to jump down from the upper circle into the pit. It was by no means unusual to see officers and soldiers dancing wildly on the stage. Sometimes the pandemonium got to such a pitch that serious rioting took place, and then the C.A.A. would have it closed or declared out of bounds for Allied troops for several evenings.

The Salonica Press was of some interest. Before the

fire there were no less than eighteen daily papers, for a city of barely 200,000 inhabitants. Even after that catastrophe their numbers were only reduced to ten. Of these four were printed in French; one of them, *L'Indépendant*, was the organ of a group of local Jews and was, on the whole, the best written, while *La Tribune* was a Greek paper published in French, opposed to the more extreme Chauvinism of the Greek people and anxious to bring about a good understanding with Italy. The other two, *L'Opinion* and the *Echo de France* were more or less organs of the French G.H.Q. and represented the political attitude of the Commander-in-Chief towards the different Allies. From a journalistic point of view, none of them ranked very high, while the two latter belonged to the class which Bismarck defined as the "reptile press." The British had only one paper, *The Balkan News*, edited by Mr. Collinson Owen. It was purely a paper for the army, containing the news of the day and a few special articles, and was well written, bright, full of wholesome cheerfulness and wit, and wholly free from local political tendencies—unlike the French papers, it never tried to create bad feeling between the Allies. We also had only one paper, *La Voce d'Italia*; it was not badly edited, but was sometimes too violent and inclined to enter into polemics with other local papers, until the Italian Command undertook to censor it (a function which, for his sins, was entrusted to the present writer). There were five papers printed in Greek, all equally violent, tendentious and wholly free from scruples or respect for accuracy. The Serbs published three papers, and the Russians, until their collapse, two. One of the Serb papers printed long poems in the style of the Kossovo cycle almost daily; they were eagerly read by the Serb soldiers, and a Serb officer told me that his batman always cut them out and kept them when the paper was thrown into the waste paper basket. There were two papers in Hebrew-Spanish, of no particular character, and several small weeklies in different languages. There were always plenty of foreign papers, although they naturally arrived many days or even weeks late. The *Journal de Genève*, which, like all neutral papers, was



banned in most other war zones, was obtainable in Salonica and much sought after, as it contained the enemy communiques. The British G.H.Q. issued a daily bulletin of war news from all sources, including those of the enemy, which was distributed to Allied Commands and Staffs.

A curious figure of Salonica life was Essad Pasha, the Albanian. An ex-General in the Turkish Army, he had fought against the Balkan Allies in the war of 1912-13, and when Prince William of Wied's Government was set up in Albania, he organized a rebellion against it. He exercised a certain amount of influence in Central Albania, where he had large landed estates, and was thus able to raise some armed bands. After the departure of Wied he tried to set up a government of his own; at one time he professed friendship for Italy, but he ended by turning against us when he found that Italian policy was not in conformity with his own personal ambitions. After the Allied Armies came to Salonica he also repaired thither, having had to leave Albania in September, 1916, as he was causing trouble to the Italian military authorities. General Sarraïl received him officially and recognized his self-styled title of "President of the Albanian Government." Protected more or less by various Powers, and subsidized simultaneously by at least four, he does not appear to have rendered useful services to anyone. He had set up a miniature *opéra-bouffe* court at Salonica, with a Government and Ministries of War, Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, etc., although he had neither a State nor an Army. He lived in a handsome villa, with his harem, and he disported himself about the town in the uniform of an Albanian General, invented by himself, and every now and then he promoted himself to a higher rank by adding a fresh star. His suite comprised a very small number of officers and soldiers, the latter mostly employed in cultivating a diminutive kitchen garden. In spite of all this, some of the Allies appeared or professed to take him seriously: the French, the Greeks and the Serbs had appointed diplomatic agents to his "Court," and did not fail to show him a certain deference. Among the Italian element the *mauvaises langues* said that he was



thus supported in order to oppose Italian interests in Albania. As his own influence was limited to Central Albania, he had no hope of dominating the northern and southern territories, and was therefore disposed to give away the former to the Serbs and the latter to the Greeks. I do not profess to know what motive inspired the attitude of the French Government towards this disreputable and ridiculous adventurer, but I believe that the C.A.A. treated him with consideration for the following reason. He claimed to be in a position to raise a rebellion in the part of Albania occupied by Austria, and although the *Deuxième Bureau* was somewhat sceptical as to his professions, it was thought worth while not to cast him off altogether, on the chance that something might come of it. As a matter of fact, he never did anything useful for the Allies, and was indeed hated by the enormous majority of the Albanians. According to Miss Durham,<sup>1</sup> who knows more about Albania than almost any other writer, if he had been thrown over at the beginning of the war a large Albanian force might have been raised to fight against the Austrians, and the Serbian *débâcle* prevented. His only merit was that he contributed something to the gaiety of nations during the duller periods of the campaign.

After the Armistice, he redoubled his intrigues with Belgrade and Athens in the hope of carrying off his little plan for a Central Albania ruled by himself and the rest of the country sold to Serbia and Greece. But the trick did not come off, and while he was in Paris he was murdered by an Albanian student on June 13, 1920. If the deed must be deplored as an act of violence, it cannot be said this his death was a loss to humanity in general nor to the Albanian people in particular. His assassin was acquitted by a Parisian jury.

The great problem of the Macedonian expedition was that of communication and transport. Whereas the enemy could send reinforcements and supplies from Central Europe to the Macedonian front by rail, every man and every ton of goods which the Allies sent out had to be conveyed across submarine-infested seas. This was one

<sup>1</sup> *Contemporary Review*, August, 1920.

of the chief arguments of those who were opposed to the undertaking altogether, as tonnage was so precious and so inadequate even for supplying Britain, France and Italy.

In the early days of the campaign, the Allied bases were Marseilles, Toulon and certain English ports. Even from Marseilles the voyage to Salonica required about a week, and when submarines were sighted immense detours were made, involving a journey of two or three weeks, or more. The voyage from England was, of course, longer, but even the British generally made use of Marseilles. When Italy decided to take part in the Macedonian campaign the Italian contingent was embarked at Naples, but soon afterwards the port of Taranto became the Italian base, and was eventually used by the British and French as well, all troops and part of the supplies being transported by rail through France and Italy. Taranto offered many advantages; the port is admirably sheltered, and the Mare Piccolo is an immense land-locked bay with unlimited space. Large British French and Italian camps were established near the town, and in due course the convoy system was adopted for greater safety. Besides the important Italian naval base, both the other Allies instituted naval bases there, and the British drifters and other anti-submarine craft became regular visitors to the Apulian port.

The voyage from Taranto to Salonica, via the Ionian Sea round Cape Matapan, took about three days, which was a great improvement on the Marseilles route, although it was by no means free from danger, and at times ships only travelled at night and had to take shelter in various intermediate ports, which, of course, increased the time. The usual precautions against submarines were taken, and the ships were painted all sorts of colours in curious geometrical designs, and the systems of intelligence and signalling were perfected. But in spite of all these efforts, many ships were lost on the Taranto-Salonica route, and still more among those which continued to cross from Marseilles or Southampton. Not infrequently, when a ship was expected carrying precious reinforcements or

long-desired supplies, the ugly news would be flashed across the seas that she had been lost. Italian losses were not very numerous on this route, but among them was the large steamer *Minas* which sank with many hundreds of soldiers.

The possibility of shortening the dangerous passage was carefully studied. The first idea had been to land the troops somewhere in Greece and forward them by the Greek railways. But at that time the Greek Government, although nominally neutral, was really assisting the Central Empires and refused to grant permission for Allied troops to traverse Greek territory, and even if it had been forced to do so it would certainly have placed every conceivable obstacle in the way. This plan having been dropped, the Italians began to study the Santi Quaranta route. There was an elementary Turkish road or rather track across Albania, but it was absolutely impassable for lorries, and even light carts could not always use it. As soon as the Italian occupation in South Albania began to extend inland, work was commenced on the road between Santi Quaranta and Ersek, while the French started on the section between Florina and Ersek over the Pisoderi pass. By the spring of 1917 a few motor cars had succeeded in going over the whole route, although not without serious difficulty. In the summer the immense work was accomplished, and by the end of July the first columns of lorries began to circulate regularly between Santi Quaranta and Florina. But the carrying capacity of the road was limited, as was the capacity of the depots and magazines at Santi Quaranta, so that the route could not serve all the Allied armies and was not even sufficient for all the supplies of the Italian contingent, the more so as part of it was also used by the Albanian force. It was therefore decided to use it only for the mails and the transport of Italian troops; supplies, save in quite exceptional cases, continued to be sent by sea to Salonica. Allied officers, however, especially Serbs going to and from Corfu, made great use of it. Its main advantage lay in the fact that the passage from Taranto or Brindisi to Santi Quaranta was only one night's crossing, so that the



danger of submarine attacks was reduced approximately to one-sixth. Another advantage was that by establishing an uninterrupted line of posts right across from the Adriatic to the Ægean the passage of messengers between King Constantine's Government and the Central Empires was practically precluded, and even after the fall of Constantine it was just as well to keep watch over the activities of Royalist sympathizers who might have continued to carry on their master's policy. A part of the route, not far from Santi Quaranta, passed through Greek territory, and permission to use it had to be negotiated while Constantine was still on the throne.

About half-way between Salonica and Santi Quaranta is Koritza, a pleasant spot and the centre of many intrigues. The town, which is situated in a fertile plain at the junction of several important roads, had been assigned to Albania by the Ambassadors' Conference in London (1913) and the Protocol of Florence (1914), the enormous majority of the population being Albanian. But as there was an active and intelligent minority professing Greek sentiments, Greece laid claim to the town and district. In 1914, Greek bands occupied it, numbers of Greek schools were opened by the Greek authorities which had installed themselves there, and the presence of a large Albanian population was explained away by being called "Albanophone Greeks." When the Italian troops began to advance from the coast towards the interior, General Sarraïl sent a detachment of cavalry under Colonel Descoins to occupy Koritza (November 1916). There remained the problem of administering the district; it could not be given to Greece, because the Treaty of London had assigned it to Albania, but Sarraïl did not wish to hand it over to the latter as there was no regularly constituted Albanian Government, and he intended to make use of the district for eventual military operations. He solved the difficulty by making of the Kaza of Koritza an autonomous "Republic." He created a local council composed of natives, with a certain Themistocles, a noted band-leader, as President, but under French military control. The Republic had its stamps,



its paper money, its budget. Later the French authorities believed that they had evidence that Themistocles was dealing with the Austrians ; he was court-martialled, condemned to death and shot. It afterwards appeared that the sentence was due to a judicial error, and that the members of the court martial had been deceived by agents of the local Greek party who wished to get rid of Themistocles because he was an influential Albanian leader. The local council was then dissolved and the territory administered very efficiently by the French military authorities. The Greeks, however, continued their attempts to get Koritza assigned to them, claiming that both that town and Moschopolje had been centres of Greek culture since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They conducted a vigorous propaganda to induce the inhabitants to send their children to the Greek schools, but the latter remained deserted, save by the children of the few Greek subjects and some Albanians of Greek sentiments. The question was not finally settled until October, 1921, when the Conference of Ambassadors definitely assigned Koritza to Albania and the Albanian State was recognized by the Powers. The French raised a small local force, known as the Koritza Gendarmerie and afterwards as the Koritza Tirailleurs. But they did not prove of much use during the war, any more than did the so-called Tabur of Essad Pasha ; between these two forces there was bitter hostility, and they could not be brought within sight of each other.

From Koritza the road ascends the Tchafa Kiarit range, then down into the broad Starja plain to Ersek, keeping at a height varying from 1,000 to 1,200 m. above the sea. The plain is green and fertile, and surrounded by fairly high mountains, the Mavri Petra, on the Graeco-Albanian frontier being 1,960 m. high. Ersek, where one usually spends the night, is the first Italian post.

The next place of some importance is Liaskoviki ; this was once a pleasant and prosperous little town, in a very healthy situation amid grand and wild scenery, where many wealthy Albanian landowners had their summer residences in order to escape the malaria of the plains. But during the Greek invasion of 1914 it was almost

completely devastated, save for the houses of the few orthodox Albanians who were presumed to be of Greek sentiments. In October, 1916, Italian troops occupied Liaskoviki and the Greeks withdrew. Here I first saw the Albanian bands in Italian service ; their appearance was satisfactory, but opinions differed as to their military qualities and reliability. As a rule those who were more directly under Italian control were the best ; left to themselves they were less useful.

Before the Italian occupation Santi Quaranta was a wretched village, consisting of large Turkish barracks, a custom-house and a few fishermen's huts. During the war it became an important military and naval base ; many large huts and even some handsome brick buildings were erected. It had been chosen as a base for transport to all parts of South Albania and later for Macedonia on account of its well-sheltered port, easy to defend against submarine attacks, and protected by the island of Corfu just opposite. Steamers cannot be moored up to the pier as the water is too shallow near the shore, and no attempt was made to deepen it or lengthen the jetties, as it was realized that after the war Santi Quaranta would lose much of its importance, Durazzo being a far more suitable starting point for a trans-Albanian commercial road or railway. The curious name of this little town is derived from the legend that forty Christians inhabiting it were massacred at some unspecified date by the Turks. The old town was not on the shore, but on a height dominating the port, and the ruins of two Venetian castles and other buildings are still visible. A third Venetian castle, with fine walls, is in the middle of the modern town. Throughout the latter period of the war Santi Quaranta was a busy place, when large troopships were constantly arriving and landing troops and stores, while torpedo boats and destroyers flitted about the bay, smaller boats plied to and from Corfu, and lorries dashed up and down the one long narrow street. At Corfu itself there were various military forces and more or less vague military missions. The French had a naval base and a military mission, the British a convalescent hospital and a mission, the

Serbs a whole Government with the Skuptschina and the Diplomatic Corps, the Italians a military mission, a battalion of territorial militia and a squadron of cavalry. The atmosphere proved as fertile for inter-Allied intrigue as the soil was for olives, vegetables and fruit.

After the abdication of Constantine and the entry of Greece into the ranks of the Allies, a new route to Macedonia was opened up—that via the Gulf of Patras and Itea. It was used only by the French and the British, but officers of other Allied armies travelled by it occasionally. The sea-passage from Taranto to Itea was much longer than that to Santi Quaranta (forty-eight hours instead of fifteen), but the part of it exposed to submarine attack was just the same, as the boats crossed from Taranto in one night to Corfu, lay off the island all day, sailed again at night-fall, along the channel between the mainland and the Ionian Islands, which was practically safe from attack, to the entrance of the Gulf of Patras, and thence up the Gulf to Itea on the northern shore.

At Itea there was a small Franco-British base, whence a good road leads to Vralo on the Athens-Salonica railway.

Altogether the journey from Taranto to Salonica via Santi Quaranta could be covered in three days, if one had a good car, while by lorry it took a little longer; but the front of the A.F.O. could be reached in two and a half days. The route from Itea to Salonica was longer—nearly four days. Detachments of troops, of course, required more time to reach their destination, so that the all-sea route was decidedly shorter, but the latter was infinitely more risky, and the opening up of the two land, or rather, semi-land routes reduced the losses from submarines very considerably, and contributed their share to the defeat of the enemy's submarine campaign.



## CHAPTER X

### IRRITATION AGAINST GENERAL SARRAIL

ONE fact which the operations in Greece had made clear was that the enemy were not at all inclined to carry out an offensive or were not in a position to do so. If they had had any such intention, no better occasion could have offered itself than at the moment when several Allied divisions had been withdrawn and when the troops were depressed by the unsuccessful offensive. If they did not know how greatly reduced was the strength of the Allied forces, they could not ignore the sending of troops to Greece. So favourable a chance of attacking was never likely to occur again, and at Salonica everybody was expecting an offensive which might have had disastrous results. But nothing happened, which was a proof either of disagreement between the Bulgars and Germans, or of the fact that the enemy did not feel very sure of themselves. Soon after, the divisions sent to Greece returned to the Macedonian front, and the immediate danger was over.

Salonica had now ceased to be a capital, and became once more a provincial town, but its military importance remained, inasmuch as it was still the centre of important military operations, and the hotbed of infinite political intrigues. General Pennella, after having remained only a few weeks in Macedonia, was recalled to Italy to assume the important position of Chief of Staff to H.R.H. the Duke d'Aosta (III Army), and the temporary command of the 35th Division was assumed by Brigadier-General Chiossi. On June 30th Major-General Ernesto Mombelli arrived at Salonica to take up the Command of the expeditionary force, which he held until it broke up in July 1919. He had begun his military career in the mountain artillery.



had passed brilliantly through the Staff College, and then entered the Staff Corps. In Libya he had distinguished himself as a Commander of Alpine troops and afterwards of a mixed force of the three arms. Subsequently he went to Rhodes as Chief of Staff to General Ameglio. The plan of operations of the successful battle of Psitos was his. From Rhodes he was sent to Constantinople as Military Attaché, and remained there until Turkey entered the war, when he was transferred to Athens. There he had occasion to display the most valuable activity, both in counter-espionage and in affirming Italy's steady loyalty within the Entente. In his dealings with the French and British on more than one occasion he was able to thwart the shady manœuvres of the Germans and their Royalist satellites. He had a thorough knowledge of the political and military situation of the near East, was endowed with great diplomatic tact, and was a man of the world, of high character, and imbued with all the best Italian military traditions. As Commander of the Italian expeditionary force under the orders of a foreign Commander-in-Chief his position was anything but easy, as the relations between the 35th Division and the C.A.A. had never been properly defined. Further, General Sarrail, as we have seen, was not too favourably inclined towards us, and never missed an opportunity of giving proof of his antipathy. Our expeditionary force was not complete—we had no field or medium calibre artillery, we were inadequately provided with means of transport and lacked certain materials with which the C.A.A. were bound to supply us, but which it very often would not or could not provide. There was thus constant friction, and our troops were finally convinced that General Sarrail wished to exploit them to the utmost limit without ever recognizing their merits. But General Mombelli, while defending our rights and dignity with the greatest possible energy and vivacity in his dealings with the C.A.A., succeeded in making himself popular, and in maintaining relations of great courtesy with the successive Commanders-in-Chief. With the British and Serbian Commanders, as I have said, his relations were always



A FLOODED ROAD.



LEAVE-PARTY FROM MACEDONIA ON THE SANTI QUARANTA ROAD.

*Photo by Lieut. Landini.]*



inspired by the greatest friendliness, especially with General Milne and Voivod Michich. In all military operations which he had occasion to carry out, he gave proof of eminent qualities as a Commander and of gallantry as a soldier. He was rigid in the matter of discipline, and devoted the greatest care to the moral and material welfare of his men. He insisted obstinately on obtaining leave for his troops, although it was claimed that such a thing was impossible for detachments beyond the sea on account of the enormous difficulties and dangers of sea transport, but he succeeded, and not a single ship transporting troops going on or returning from leave was ever torpedoed. He was relentlessly severe against all who failed in their military duties, or whose conduct was incompatible with the dignity of an Italian soldier. He had no consideration for those officers, very few in number it must be said, who neglected their men at the front.

Among the incidents which occurred between the Italians and General Sarrail, there was one due to the obstruction which the latter placed in the way of the creation of our lines-of-communication posts along the Santi Quaranta road in the part which crossed the French zone. Other incidents arose on account of the attitude of the local Franco-Greek press which was subsidized by or under the strict control of the C.A.A. To the Press General Sarrail attributed enormous importance. Every day he received the journalists, and daily devoted an hour to listening to the reports of the censorship officers, even in critical moments when a Commander-in-Chief should have been occupied with very different matters. For all these reasons General Sarrail made himself ever more unpopular and impossible. As early as the beginning of 1916 the British, Italian and Russian Governments had brought considerable pressure to bear on that of France in favour of the recall of Sarrail, and it appears that the first to demand this was M. Isvolski, the Russian Ambassador in Paris, who had been informed of the complaints against Sarrail, especially those which General Dietrich had made after the autumn operations.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mermeix, *Le Commandement Unique*, Part II, pp. 114 and following.



At the same time, Lord Bertie, British Ambassador in Paris, in a note to the French Government, pointed out General Sarrail's preference for political operations, and verbally dwelt on the difficulties of the relations between him and the other Commanders, due to his own character and to his entourage. He added that he was also speaking in the name of Italy and Russia. M. Briand, then Prime Minister, at first showed annoyance and said that France refused to discuss the merits of a French General in whom she had confidence, but to this Lord Bertie replied that if Sarrail was a French General, the Army d'Orient was international. He quoted the words attributed to General Cadorna, who is reported to have said: "I shall send more troops to Macedonia when there is a General to command them." All this made a certain impression in France, but the capture of Monastir raised Sarrail's prestige, although the exaggerated praises lavished on him by his political friends did him harm, especially those of M. Painlevé, the Minister of Public Instruction. Criticism did not cease, and an Italian Ambassador is reported to have said that Sarrail "preferred to reap the grain harvest in Thessaly rather than laurels round Monastir." An Italian Minister said to a French diplomat in connexion with the disagreement among the Allies in Macedonia: "All this would not have happened if you had given us a General who besides having our sympathy also enjoyed our confidence, but you have sent to Salonica, and you maintain there, a General who is merely imposed on you by your internal situation." The real reason why Sarrail, who was not popular even in French Government circles, where he was admitted to be unsuited to his duties, continued to be supported must be sought in his political antecedents. The men at the head of affairs in France believed at that time that, after the war, there would be a strong revival of religious, Legitimist and anti-Republican feeling, and of the generals of high rank General Sarrail was the only one on whom the Government, or rather the Radical-Socialist Party, believed that it could count absolutely for the defence of Republican institutions. Sarrail, in fact, as I have said, was a Free-

Mason and an anti-Clerical, and during the Combes Ministry he had co-operated—the only field officer who would agree to do so—in the system of *fiches de delation* against officers guilty of religious practices. He was therefore so thoroughly compromised in the eyes of the Clerical, anti-Masonic, Monarchical parties, that there was no danger of his coming to an agreement with them. Naturally he was anything but popular with the enormous majority of officers of all ranks, and even those who were not fervent Clericals had no sort of regard for him. At the same time, the French Government did not wish to have him in France, because they feared him as an incorrigible intriguer and wished to keep him out of the way. For all these reasons, the Government did not dare to recall him, although they did not wish to entrust him with an important Command on any part of the front. They therefore gave evasive replies to the protests of the Allies.

Nevertheless the Allied Governments again insisted in demanding his recall. On the eve of the May offensive in 1917, Mr. Lloyd George had been given the assurance that General Sarrail would be relieved as soon as the operations were ended. This would also have given time to reconsider the whole question of the Command in the near East. At one time it had been proposed to send strong Italian reinforcements to that front with the Duke of Aosta as Commander-in-Chief of the Allied armies, but the proposal was dropped. When the offensive came to an absolutely unsuccessful end, chiefly owing to the failure of Sarrail, the latter continued to hold his Command in spite of the ever-increasing irritation at his conduct on the part of all the Allies, including now even the Crown Prince of Serbia. The French Government, however, now asked that he should be left in Salonica until the Greek question had been finally settled. After the abdication of Constantine and the return of Venizelos, the British Government reopened the Sarrail question; but M. Painlevé, who had become Minister of War in the Ribot Cabinet, continued to support him. On July 25th Mr. Lloyd George said to him:

“ You assume the whole responsibility, but as a matter of fact, the Armée d'Orient is now condemned to immobility because the failure of the Russian offensive (that ordered by Kerensky) removes all hopes of co-operation between the Russian and Roumanian Armies and that of the Orient.” But M. Painlevé had such a fanatical admiration for Sarrail that this responsibility caused him no anxiety whatever. A few days later, on the fall of the Ribot Cabinet, Painlevé became Prime Minister.

Although the Allied Governments continued to desire the recall of Sarrail, they considered that it was advisable to suspend their demand for the moment. In France there was great depression and pessimism about the progress of the war, owing to the unsuccessful offensive at the Chemin des Dames and the enormous losses suffered, as well as to the serious military mutinies organized by the Socialists, which had to be repressed with ruthless but just severity. The Allies, therefore, deemed it inadvisable to add to the embarrassments of the French Government.

After the May operations, the Governments of France, Great Britain and Italy were more than ever convinced, as Mr. Lloyd George had said, that an Allied offensive in Macedonia was impossible, at least for the moment—perhaps they did not yet understand how large a part of the failure was due to the strategic errors of General Sarrail. Although it was not their intention to withdraw the expeditionary force altogether, a shortening of the front was contemplated. The British, above all, were anxious to achieve this, and two Divisions (the 10th and 60th) were already in course of evacuation, being destined for Palestine, and the French, although they did not withdraw any of their units, allowed their strengths to drop progressively without filling the gaps. We alone had, until then, maintained our effectives up to strength—our 3 brigades comprised 18,000 rifles—but now, seeing that the Allies were reducing their strengths, we also ended by sending to Albania and thence to Italy, the so-called 7th Battalions.<sup>1</sup> The British Government wished that the whole front should be withdrawn within the entrenched

<sup>1</sup> They were supplementary battalions, one to each brigade.



camp at Salonica, and the French were not altogether opposed to this scheme. Its execution, it is true, presented serious practical difficulties. A withdrawal of this kind in the face of an enemy in full efficiency is always a very risky operation. It would probably have caused the loss of a great many men and of a large part of the artillery, which it would have been difficult to transport over the rough ground of Macedonia. Another problem was how to defend the entrenched camp, if a great deal of the artillery were lost. The strongest opposition to the scheme came from the Serbs. The Prince-Regent declared definitely that a withdrawal would have a disastrous moral effect on the whole Serbian Army, and that if it were effected he would have great difficulty in exercising authority over it. Depressed as the troops already were, the evacuation of the small tract of Serbian territory which they had reconquered with so much bloodshed, would have produced a regular *débâcle*, and as the Austrians at that time were offering them extremely advantageous peace terms, which an influential party in the army were prepared to accept, it was by no means impossible that the Russian collapse would have been followed by a Serbian separate peace. Finally, if the Allies had limited themselves to holding the entrenched camp at Salonica, the Central Empires would no longer have been prevented from communicating with their friends in Greece. For all these reasons the plan, which was really a mad one, was abandoned.

We had another difficulty with General Sarrail concerning the extension of our front. He was always insisting that we should extend our line so as to give the French divisions a chance of more frequent turns of rest, but our sector was one of the most difficult, and the defences were anything but complete, so that General Petitti had constantly opposed this request. General Pennella, to whom it was presented again, replied to the same effect. On General Mombelli, General Sarrail brought new and stronger pressure to bear with the same end in view, but after a careful study of the situation, he came to the same conclusion, and appealed to the Italian *Comando*



*Supremo.* The latter referred the question to the Commander-in-Chief in France, who stated that he would try to convince General Sarrail, but that if the latter insisted on his plan, he would not be able to take upon himself the responsibility of giving contrary orders. As a matter of fact, however, General Sarrail did not insist and the Italian front remained for the moment unchanged.

## CHAPTER XI

### FROM THE SALONICA FIRE TO THE RECALL OF SARRAIL

ON August 18, 1917, there occurred one of those catastrophes in which the history of Salonica is so rich. At about three p.m. a fire broke out in a small house occupied by a poor Jewish widow in the central part of the old town. For four months not a drop of rain had fallen, and at Salonica there was no adequate organization for fighting the flames, except a small and ill-equipped fire-brigade inherited from the Turks. The Allied Armies had their own fire-engines, but the C.A.A. had made no arrangements in view of a possible conflagration in the city, for which the local authorities were supposed to provide. Big fires were by no means unknown in Salonica; some thirty years before a considerable part of the town had been destroyed by the flames, and other fires had occurred fairly frequently. The water supply was totally inadequate and the pressure very weak. The great majority of the houses in the old town were of wood and even in the others there was a great deal of woodwork; as if this were not enough, a high wind was blowing at the time. All circumstances were therefore propitious for a first-class fire. In a very short time the flames spread far and wide, and from the poor hovel of the Jewish widow it soon enveloped a large part of the city in a vast conflagration. About sunset the Italian military band was still playing in the Place de la Liberté near the sea, and no one imagined that the flames could possibly come so far down (the quarter where it had broken out was half-way up the hill). But by ten at night the handsome buildings along the sea front

were menaced, and had to be rapidly evacuated ; during the night they, too, caught fire. The heat of the flames was so terrific that, although these structures were of brick and stone, they were swept away like the wooden hovels. Even the rails of the railway along the quay on the side opposite the houses and many yards away from them, were twisted out of shape by the heat. Throughout the night there was a general exodus of the population from the awful furnace. One saw families abandoning their homes carrying some clothes, bedding and other household goods, which were afterwards set alight by sparks scattered by the wind.

Allied detachments were distributed about the various quarters of the town to prevent pillaging, to which the local hooligans and a certain number of soldiers belonging to one or two of the Allied armies devoted themselves. We were glad to be able to establish that no Italian soldiers took part in these operations, and the same may be said of the British. The military lorries, especially those of the British Army, accomplished admirable salvage work ; all through the night and the following day they plied back and forth between the fire zone and the British camps outside the city. Our own lorries were for the most part engaged in clearing our clothing depot, which was the only military establishment in the centre of Salonica ; fortunately the flames only just reached its outer wall, which was blackened, and a few days later it was possible to occupy it again. The premises occupied by the C.A.A. were also evacuated for a day or two, as they were at one moment in danger, but the fire never actually reached them. Luckily no military establishment was destroyed, save one or two depots of trifling importance.

The damage to the city was, however, enormous. All the hotels, very many business houses, all the best shops, a large number of stores and warehouses, the post office and other public buildings and a vast number of private dwellings, especially in the poorer part of the Jewish quarter, were razed to the ground. The banks were spared, and so also were the hospitals, and the flames

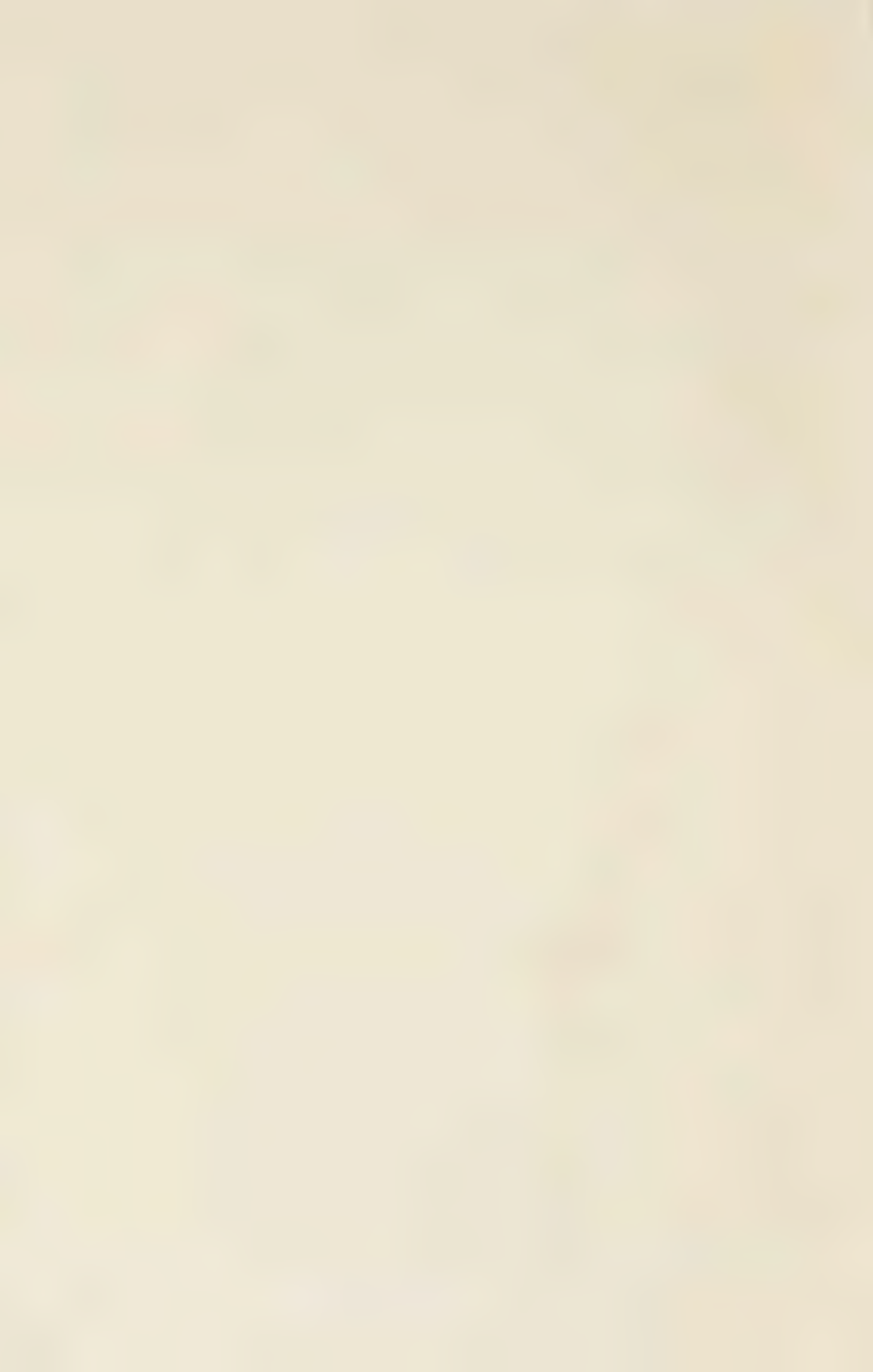


BULGARIAN PRISONERS.



IN THE "CASTELLETTO" TRENCHES.





never reached the new quarters where all the best private houses were situated. One of the most serious losses, because it was irreparable, was that of the beautiful church of St. Demetrius, historically and artistically the most important monument in Salonica.

This catastrophe, although it did not directly affect the Allied armies, created a problem which the military authorities could not disregard, viz., that of housing and feeding many thousands of refugees. By far the greater part of these were Jews, and the Greek authorities, supported in this by General Sarrail, had at first contemplated their evacuation, and it was proposed that they should be sent to Old Greece, to the islands and abroad, so as to avoid exposing them to hardships and to preserve the city from the dangers of epidemics, which the excessive overcrowding in the few remaining houses might easily have caused. This scheme naturally appeared the soundest from the point of view of public health. Incidentally it also presented the advantage, from the Greek point of view, that with the exodus of a large part of the Jewish inhabitants, the Greek element would have come to constitute an absolute majority of the population, thus eliminating the danger that at the future Peace Conference, the Salonica Jews, anything but attached to the Greek régime, might demand autonomy on the basis of "self-determination."

In any case the question was settled by the Jews themselves, who, save a very small minority, refused to depart. They knew that as long as the Allied armies were there they were assured of a necessary minimum of food, and that they would be able, in a very short time, to make good the losses they had suffered, whereas if they went to Old Greece or elsewhere they would find themselves in the midst of an unfriendly and poor population, where they could not even manage to earn their daily bread. It was said of the Salonica Jews, as of the Armenians, that their idea of paradise was an endless street of shops with Allied soldiers walking up and down it; Salonica, even after the fire, was not very different from this picture. The Jews whose houses

were still standing were very generous in giving hospitality to their less fortunate co-religionists, and everyone was ready to limit the space occupied. Provisionally, the British gave shelter to many thousands of the more needy refugees in some large camps on the outskirts of the city, while the Greek Government and all the Allied armies contributed towards feeding them. Little by little, all found shelter of some sort, goodness knows how, and soon trading on a small scale began to spring up again. At first it would be an itinerant pedlar with a tray full of reels of cotton, a few pairs of stockings, some yards of linen or canvas, and a little hardware. Then the tray became a hand-cart, with a somewhat more abundant stock of goods, and the hand-cart was next transformed into a stationary cart. A few days later the cart was sheltered by a few boards; the whole outfit soon began to take on the appearance of a modest hut, a little better stocked, almost a regular shop. The profits of these traders, owing to the great scarcity of goods, were quite fabulous.

For a long time the Greek Government refused to grant any permits to rebuild in the burnt area, because it contemplated a grandiose plan of reconstruction, based on an elaborate scheme which should have made of Salonica a model city, with broad piazze, wide boulevards, imposing public buildings, stately residences, perfect workmen's dwellings, Rowton houses, an elaborate electric tramway system, electric undergrounds, a university, opera houses, concert halls, and even a forest on the outskirts. But as all this was in the dim and distant future and the inhabitants insisted on being allowed to make some temporary arrangements, permission was finally granted to rebuild the ground floors of the houses, the authorities reserving the right to demolish them without compensation if the general reconstruction plan were carried out. The Salonica merchants did not hesitate to take that risk, and at once began to rebuild. In a few months they had recouped themselves for their losses with a broad margin of profit. One cannot help admiring their persistence, which was

amply rewarded. But the problem of general reconstruction has remained unsolved to this day. A wealthy business man told me (and his opinion was confirmed by other experts) that everything depended on the future political status of the city. If it should be endowed with local autonomy and become a free port, the money would easily be found, not only for rebuilding Salonica, but also for the necessary works to prevent the silting up of the harbour; the local Jews, with their own resources and those of their co-religionists abroad, would provide it. But if Salonica were to remain a Greek provincial town, without autonomy, at the mercy of the Athens politicians, no one would invest any capital in it. Indeed, many of the most far-sighted and enterprising business men would leave altogether. I do not know whether this opinion is right, but it certainly represented the conviction of almost the whole of the city's business community.

On August 31st an Italian detachment made a surprise attack on the summit of Hill 1050. The position was captured with brilliant dash, but before the troops could entrench themselves adequately they were exposed to such a terrific artillery and trench-mortar fire that it was not possible to remain, and General Mombelli, in order to avoid useless losses, recalled the detachment. There were no enemy counter-attacks.

Early in September, General Sarraïl undertook an action at his extreme left against the Austrians and Bulgarians in Albania, to liberate the road between Florina and Ersek from the menace of hostile attack, and to push on the Pogradetz on the Lake of Ochrida. With this object in view he made up a group consisting of 3 infantry regiments, some mountain artillery and other minor units. The French line just skirted the Lake of Ochrida and then turned sharp to the south, east of the river Cerava, reached Lake Malik near Nishavetz and continued to the south of the lake, almost parallel with the Koritza-Ersek road. On September 7th, a column of the 176th Regiment occupied Placa between the Lakes of Ochrida and Malik, and drove back the enemy



beyond the Cerava. On the 8th, another column forced the passage of the Devoli river, west of Lake Malik. On the 9th, Pogradetz was occupied, this being the only place where some resistance was offered, the enemy forces consisting of Bulgarians, Austrians, Albanians in the Austrian service, and some Saxon troops sent over expressly from another sector of the front. The French pushed forward along the west shore of Lake Ochrida as far as Udunista (9 km. north of Pogradetz) and spread westward as far as Hill 1704, whence they hoped to command the Durazzo-Struga road, one of the lines of supply of the extreme right wing of the enemy. At the same time a column composed of French troops and Albanian irregulars advanced along the upper Skumbi, and on the 21st a French detachment delivered a surprise attack on Golik (6 or 7 km. south of the Durazzo-Struga road), capturing 480 prisoners and putting a similar number of the enemy *hors de combat*, with the loss of only 16 men. Altogether the French made about a thousand prisoners in these operations. In October, there was a slight renewal of activity in this area, but the line occupied varied little, and was finally stabilized along the following points: Udunista, Hill 1704, Velichani Mokra, Gora Top, and thence southward. There was not, however, a continuous line, as on the Western fronts or even in other parts of the Macedonian front, but only a series of more or less isolated posts. The troops in this sector were formed into what was called the Provisional Infantry Division, commanded by General Jacquemot. The detachments forming it soon afterwards returned to their respective units, but subsequently, in consequence of information received concerning a probable Bulgarian counter-offensive along the west shore of Lake Ochrida, with the object of recapturing Pogradetz and perhaps again menacing the Santi Quaranta road, the Provisional Division was reconstituted; but the threatened attack never took place.

The French had thus obtained some not indifferent territorial advantages by means of this very well conducted operation. But they now found themselves with

an extended front and their left flank in the air, a situation which, in the face of an enterprising enemy, might have been very dangerous, all the more so as their supplies had to be transported on mule-back over very difficult country. But neither the Bulgarians nor the Austrians were then in a position to attempt operations in that area, which was as arduous for them as for the French.

During the month of November, in consequence of the terrible disaster of Caporetto, there were persistent rumours from various sources of an imminent enemy offensive on the Macedonian and Albanian fronts. The landing of several German divisions at Durazzo and the arrival of numerous reinforcements on the Macedonian front from Roumania were reported, chiefly from neutral countries (Spain and Switzerland). The Austro-German victory on the Italian front was enthusiastically fêted by the enemy forces in the Balkans, and a vigorous propaganda was conducted, especially among the Serbs, by means of grandiloquent proclamations and invitations to make a separate peace, dropped into the Allied lines. General Sarraïl did not believe in this offensive, and as things turned out his scepticism proved well founded. All that actually did happen was a slight increase in the enemy's battalion strength. The number of enemy battalions, which had risen from 239 in February to 267 in May, and had fallen to 237 in August, again rose to 285 in November. These battalions were nearly all Bulgarian, save for a variable but ever-decreasing number of German battalions—they were then eight or nine—and the 177th Turkish Regiment, the last remnant of the 2 Turkish divisions which had been formerly on the Macedonian front; even this was soon afterwards withdrawn. It appears, however, that the actual strength of the battalions had been progressively weakened, so that the increase was more apparent than real.

Besides all their other difficulties, the Russian trouble was now added. In the early days of the campaign the Russian troops had fought very well, especially in the operations round Monastir. But the revolution in Russia

had its reaction, although in an attenuated form, also in Macedonia. At first the trouble was caused by the partisans of the old régime, who appeared unwilling to go on fighting for the Russian Republic, and among these there was, it is said, a Brigadier-General. Then the poisonous Bolshevik infection began to spread among the troops, destroying all discipline and patriotic sentiment. Whereas formerly many of the officers had neglected and brutally ill-treated their men, and often embezzled the army funds, now the brutalized and ignorant soldiers began to refuse to obey them. The famous soldiers' committees were formed, the result of which was the abolition of all respect for authority and the placing of a premium on cowardice and treachery. It was impossible to punish a soldier even if he were guilty of the most infamous crime without the judgment of the committee, and the latter invariably acquitted the accused. If the idiotic blunders of Kerenski and the ignoble infamies of Lenin and Trotzky did not produce such immediate and disastrous effects in Macedonia as they did in Russia, it is because the Russians were but a small minority among the other Allied troops who were not infected by the plague.

At the time of the expedition to Greece the effects of revolutionary ideas among the Russian troops became even more visible, the conduct of the men being disgracefully undisciplined and scandalous. Then there were rumours of "fraternization" at the front between Russians and Bulgarians, and, although no very serious incidents seem to have occurred, the mere possibility of them was in itself alarming. The 7th and 8th Regiments gave most signs of insubordination and demoralization, and one of the most culpable individuals appear to have been Colonel Mindru, the Commander of the 7th Regiment, who hoped to make himself popular by placing himself at the head of the revolutionary movement. General Dietrich, an excellent officer, had been recalled to Russia in the summer of 1917, and after a series of temporary Commanders, General Taranowski had arrived at the beginning of November to take command of the division.



But by that time the Bolshevik revolution was triumphant, and the Russian division was going to pieces. At the beginning of January 1918, the Soviets of the 3rd, 7th and 8th Regiments demanded to be withdrawn to the second line, whereas the 4th was ready to remain in the trenches. The more insubordinate elements were sent to North Africa to perform almost forced labour. The others were offered the choice of either continuing to fight or of working in Macedonia as paid labourers. A small minority requested to be sent to fight, and were shipped off to France where they were incorporated in the Russian legion, and so did those of Polish nationality, who joined the Polish Legion. Some of the others agreed to work, but the great majority would neither fight nor work, and these were consequently forced to work, practically as prisoners of war. It is not likely that the French officers and men who had charge of them were particularly tender towards these blackguards who had betrayed the cause of the Entente and were responsible for the indefinite prolongation of the war, to the total advantage of the German.

Gradually the Russian Division was dissolved, by no means a simple matter, owing to the administrative chaos in which its officers had left it. The Russian officers remaining in Macedonia or relegated to Greece did not, save a few exceptions, give a very edifying spectacle of themselves. They continued their unseemly riotous living, extravagantly spending money obtained no one knew how, and bombarded the French *Intendance*, to whom the liquidation of the force was entrusted, for increases of salary, advances, demobilization bonuses, etc. The total number of Russian troops in Macedonia had been about 15,000, so that their disappearance constituted an appreciable reduction of effectives.

The discipline of the French troops of the A.F.O. under Sarraill's régime had been getting worse and worse, as was proved by the mutinies which occurred in the 57th Division. The immediate cause of the trouble was the impossibility of granting leave to the majority of the men who were entitled to it. Salonica was full of soldiers on



their way home on leave, but who could not depart owing to the scarcity of tonnage. The worst disorders occurred among the men of the 242nd Infantry Regiment, who after the end of their period of rest, refused to return to the trenches. The Command was not in a position to apply extreme measures, and had to adopt sometimes the strong and sometimes the gentle manner. Order was, however, finally re-established, and the last ninety mutineers were surrounded and disarmed without bloodshed (July 1917). Similar incidents occurred in the 2bis Zouaves. General Sarrail attributed the trouble to the officers who had, he declares, first encouraged them and then tried to keep in the background.<sup>1</sup>

All these episodes were signs of a very unsatisfactory spirit, and were calculated to make the French Government ever more doubtful of Sarrail's military qualities. Another incident was now to prove the last straw. We have already spoken of General Sarrail's situation with regard to the Allies and to French policy. Partly from a legitimate desire to see the Armée d'Orient treated with more consideration and adequately supplied with reinforcement and material, but still more from his incorrigible tendency to political intrigue, he tried, while M. Briand was still in office, to provoke a political campaign against him in France, as he considered him responsible for the troubles of his Army and attributed to his influence the fact that the French Government often gave way to the Allies in matters concerning the Macedonian Campaign. He had sent to Paris a report on the Armée d'Orient whose conditions he described in the darkest colours, insisting that this state of things should be remedied adequately, so as to avoid an otherwise inevitable disaster. So far there was, of course, no harm. But when the *Bonnet Rouge* scandal broke out it appeared from the papers of the traitor Almercyda that he had had a copy of the Sarrail report in his hands and that he had communicated it to agents of the German Government, who thus came to know the state of weakness of the Macedonian force; had the enemy been in a position to act upon this

<sup>1</sup> Sarrail, *Mon Commandement en Orient*.

knowledge the Macedonian campaign might have ended in a very disastrous manner. But who had communicated the precious document to Almereyda ? It was discovered in the course of the inquiry that he had received it from a certain Sergeant Paix-Séailles, a journalist and politician, who in all probability ignored the fact that Almereyda was a traitor, but wished to make use of him for the campaign against M. Briand. Paix-Séailles had obtained the document from Captain Mathieu, an officer attached to the Staff of General Sarrail. Mathieu took upon himself the whole responsibility for the affair, and received a disciplinary punishment from the court martial, but it was impossible to eliminate the general conviction that he would never have made such use of so confidential a document if he had not been authorized to do so by his Chief, whose full confidence he enjoyed and whose hostility to Briand was notorious. About the same time the famous Caillaux *dossier* came to light, in which was a plan for the appointment of General Sarrail as Commander-in-Chief of the French Army ; the appointment was to be made after the *coup d'état* which Caillaux was contemplating. Even if Sarrail himself had no knowledge of this scheme, the mere fact that his name appeared among the persons in whom Caillaux had confidence made a very bad impression.

On November 13th the Painlevé Cabinet fell and was succeeded by that of M. Clemenceau. To the latter the Allied Ministers, in the Versailles meeting of December 2nd, communicated all the complaints against Sarrail. M. Clemenceau studied the various files concerning him very carefully, and thus became acquainted with the above-mentioned episodes. In spite of the pressure of the General's political friends, Clemenceau had the courage to cut the Gordian knot without hesitating ; on December 7th Sarrail received his order of recall, on the 22nd he left Salonica, and after a series of inquiries he was placed on the retired list.

His departure was welcomed with a sense of relief and satisfaction by all the Allies, and even among the French officers it caused no regret, save in a small group

of persons in his immediate entourage who had taken advantage of his friendship to obtain exceptional promotion and other advantages for themselves. With General Sarrail his Chief of the Staff, General Michaud, also departed.

## CHAPTER XII

### GENERAL GUILLAUMAT

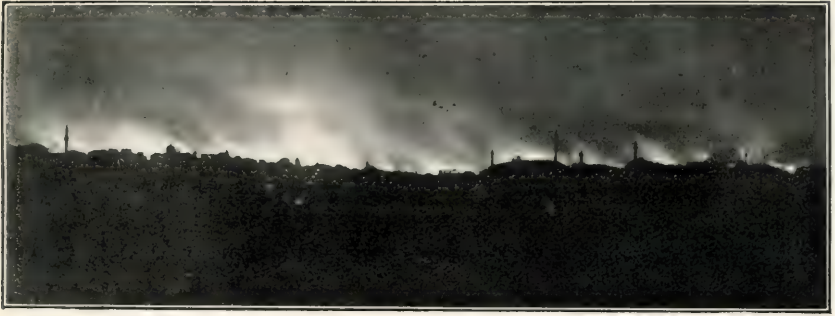
GENERAL SARRAIL was succeeded by General Guillaumat. The latter was a man of very different stamp. A good soldier and a thorough gentleman, he immediately acquired an authority over the other Allied Commanders such as had never been enjoyed by his predecessor. In France he had given proof of high military qualities, but he remained a short time in Macedonia and had no opportunity of carrying out an offensive. His earnestness of purpose and conduct, however, which were soon made manifest, argued well for the future, and while the merit of the victory is justly attributed to General Franchet d'Espérey, the plan of operations is due, in no small part, to General Guillaumat. Above all he restored the discipline of the A.F.O., which had been badly shaken under the unfortunate Sarraill régime. He brought a new Chief of the Staff with him, General Charpy, who was certainly superior to General Michaud, but he was to prove not too friendly towards the Italians; he retained his post until after the end of the campaign.

The Commander of the A.F.O. was also changed in the autumn of 1918, but for other reasons. General Grossetti was forced to leave Macedonia owing to a serious illness, which had a fatal ending; he left an excellent memory of himself, for his fine military qualities and his character. He was succeeded by General Régnauld, late Commander of a group of divisions in Macedonia; he in his turn was succeeded by General Henrys. With the successive Commanders of the A.F.O. our relations were always cordial and friendly, even when they were less so with the C.A.A. It was in fact much easier for two fine soldiers



such as Generals Petitti and Mombelli to agree with fighting leaders endowed with qualities similar to their own than with Generals whose attention was largely monopolized by political affairs.

While the Armée d'Orient had suffered a reduction of strength in consequence of the Russian defection, it received in the winter of 1917-18 an unexpected reinforcement in the Serbian Army. During the early period of the war a large number of Yugoslav subjects of Austria-Hungary—Serbs, Bosnians and Herzegovinians, Croats, Slovenes, etc.—had been made prisoners by the Russians. Not a few had, in fact, from hatred of their own Government, voluntarily surrendered. They afterwards declared themselves ready to enlist in the Russian Army to fight against the Dual Monarchy, and as there were very few officers among them (the Austro-Hungarian Command was careful to bestow commissions only on persons on whose loyalty it could depend), a number of regular officers of the Serbian Army were sent out to command them. Thus some Yugoslav divisions were formed which fought gallantly on the Russian side against the Austrians and Germans. When the revolution broke out in Russia they continued to fight in spite of the gradual defection of the Russian Army, and in the last offensive in June and July 1917 in Galicia, which began with a success and ended in disaster, they found themselves abandoned by their erstwhile comrades in arms, and suffered enormous losses, as the Russians, infected with Bolshevism, either ran away or began to "fraternize" with their own worst enemies. Finally, when the Russian situation had become manifestly hopeless, they determined to go and join their brothers in Macedonia. The enterprise was no easy one, for if the distance between the borders of Galicia and Macedonia was short, invaded Roumania and hostile Bulgaria stood between. It was therefore necessary to cross the whole of Russia. The first detachments went to Archangel, where they embarked for England, thence they travelled across France to Toulon, there they re-embarked for Italy, and finally came on by road and rail to Salonica, where they began to arrive at the end of



THE SALONICA FIRE (NIGHT FROM AUGUST 18TH TO 19TH, 1917).



CAMP OF THE 111TH FLIGHT (ITALIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE).



November, 1917, after a journey of many months. Others followed in December and January. Those of them whom I saw in the train between Vralo and Salonica were really fine-looking soldiers; indeed, only picked men could have had the endurance to face all these difficulties voluntarily. But the last detachments underwent even more dramatic vicissitudes. They found themselves in the midst of Bolshevized Russia, hostile to themselves and a vassal to Germany. Lenin, acting in Germany's interests, did not wish to allow them to leave, and it was only thanks to the absolute anarchy then dominant in the country that they were able, after infinite difficulties, to continue their journey. The Bolsheviks at first demanded that the infamous soldiers' councils should be instituted among them, but the Yugoslavs refused to destroy their own discipline. Lenin insisted that every single man should state individually that he wished to go to Macedonia, and the great majority did so. But during the journey they had to give up their arms and encountered every sort of obstacle and obstruction, while Russian employers and contractors, by offering them very high wages, tried to induce them to remain in Russia, where no one else wanted to work any longer; a certain number could not withstand the temptation and remained behind. The Archangel route being no longer practicable, they had to travel by the Trans-Siberian railway, so that to go from the Danube to Salonica they crossed the whole of European Russia, Siberia, Manchuria and on to Dalny, where they embarked, crossed the China Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean, finally landing at Salonica—a trifle of some 15,000 km.

On reaching Salonica they were sent to the camp at Mikra, re-equipped, armed and sent on to the front. In all they were 8,000 to 10,000 men; part of them were distributed among the existing units, so as to infuse fresh blood into their reduced effectives, but some 3,500 to 4,000 were embodied in a new brigade of 2 regiments attached to the Vardar Division, which thenceforth assumed the name of Yugoslav Division; its other brigade, made up of the effectives of its 3 original regiments (reduced to 2)



was called the Vardar Brigade. This division was the only one in the Serbian Army which comprised 4 regiments.

The arrival of these reinforcements produced a moral effect wholly out of proportion with the material increase of strength which it represented. The spirit of the soldiers had been gradually becoming more and more depressed owing to the long-delayed expectation and the constant losses which were never made good. They saw everything in the gloomiest colours and had lost practically all hope of final victory; the influence of the party favourable to a separate peace with Austria steadily grew stronger. But the mere sight of these 8,000 new combatants, who had faced such fearful hardships to reach Macedonia and who knew that if they were taken prisoners they would receive but short shrift, spread a new spirit of hope throughout the Serbian Army. These were the first reinforcements which it had received for about a year.

I went to see some of the Yugoslav detachments which had arrived from Russia at their camp, and I learned that the great majority of them were Orthodox Bosnians and Herzegovinians. The Catholic Croats, Dalmatians and Slovenes were but a trifling minority. In fact, most of the Yugoslavs of Croatia, Dalmatia and the Slovene lands, who had been captured in Russia refused to enrol themselves to fight against Austria, with very few exceptions, for the inhabitants of those territories remained faithful henchmen of the Dual Monarchy until the Armistice.

In Italy there were some 30,000 more Yugoslav prisoners, part of whom had been captured by the Serbs and then conducted into Albania after the collapse of the Serbian Army, whence they were afterwards shipped to Italy. In consequence of the serious crisis of effectives which paralysed the Serbian Army in Macedonia, the Serbian Government, then established at Corfu, made application to that of Italy that all the prisoners of Yugoslav race should be given into its charge. Negotiations were instituted with this object, but the Italian Government raised objections of various kinds. There was at first some hesitation in handing them over to the Serbs for

fear of reprisals by Austria against our own prisoners. It also transpired that at least a large part of them had no desire to go to fight in Macedonia, especially those who were not Orthodox. Furthermore, the Serbian Government committed the *gaffe* of sending as its representative to visit the prisoners in question an officer of the Serbian Army, who was a Slovene from Opicina near Trieste and consequently a future Italian citizen. On the eve of the general offensive in Macedonia the negotiations had led to no result, and the Serbian Government made a show of great irritation against us, attributing our reluctance to ill-will against the Yugoslav nation. But as a matter of fact, while the Serbian G.H.Q. at Salonica and the Government at Corfu were officially and ostentatiously insisting that the prisoners should be consigned to them, I learned from Serbian officers in very close touch with the leading generals that the latter were by no means too anxious to swell the ranks of their army with elements whose loyalty was regarded with considerable doubt. A few days before the offensive, one of those officers admitted to me in confidence: "Just now our Command is so fully occupied with preparations for the coming action that it has no time to think about the prisoners in Italy. And then we do not particularly trust these semi-Austrian gentry." The difficulties raised by us were the object of complaints made to the other Allies regarding our conduct, but in truth the Serbian Government was by no means sorry to have an excuse for dropping the scheme.

By this time almost the whole of the Greek Army had been transported to Macedonia. The three divisions of the National Defence Army Corps (except for one regiment retained in Athens) was united under the command of General Zimbrakakis, and distributed between Nonte and the Vardar, forming part of the 1st Group of Divisions. Other divisions belonging to the regular army and reorganized by the French Military Mission, were moving towards the Struma front. Their effectives were considerable, as the divisions were all up to strength and almost free from war losses. But in spite of the intensive training

to which they had been subjected by the French officers at the Naresh camp, both officers and men still had very scanty notions of modern methods of warfare. Among the officers, moreover, even after the severe cleansing, Royalist feeling had by no means disappeared, and a British officer attached to the Greek Army assured me that at more than one Greek mess the health of the exiled King was still drunk. The great unknown factor was the fighting value of these soldiers. Those of the National Defence Corps were now sufficiently inured to war, but about the others nothing was known.

As it was necessary, in view of reports of a coming enemy offensive, to obtain reliable information, local operations were intensified. On the night of April 14-15, 1918, Greek and British detachments made an incursion beyond the Struma (north-west of Lake Tahinos), and occupied various villages; the Bulgars counter-attacked and regained some of the lost positions. The Greeks had behaved well, although the engagement was of small importance. The local Greek press, and also the French papers, inspired by the C.A.A., extolled this episode to the skies as though it were a first-class victory. Even in the restaurants at Athens banquets were given, with abundance of champagne, to celebrate the great triumph.

At the end of May the National Defence Forces carried out a much more important operation. The enemy occupied a strong position on the *massif* known as the Srka di Legen<sup>1</sup> near Huma, which formed a very awkward salient for the Allies. During the last days of May, a powerful group of French artillery, together with 2 British 8-inch guns, were concentrated in that area and opened a heavy bombardment on the enemy lines. The British heavy batteries on the Smol (left bank of the Vardar) also contributed their share. On the 29th, the attack began, and the Greek troops rushed the enemy trenches at dawn on the 30th, supported by a powerful barrage fire. The 1st (Serres), 5th and 6th (Archipelago) Regiments gained possession of the defensive positions of the

<sup>1</sup> The name appears in this odd semi-Italian form in the Austrian 1/200000 staff map.



Srka di Legen, while the 7th (Cretan) Regiment occupied the heights between the two branches of the Ljumnitza River. On a front of 12 km. and for a depth of 2 km. the whole complicated maze of formidable defences was thus conquered. The action was so rapid that the Bulgarian barrage did not begin until the attacking troops were already well out of their trenches. The enemy counter-attacks, weakly pushed, were easily repulsed, and the Greeks captured some 1,700 prisoners and a considerable amount of booty, losing from 500 to 600 men, killed and wounded. The Greeks behaved extremely well, and their Commander, General Ioannou, greatly distinguished himself for his personal courage. A fresh Bulgarian counter-attack was expected during the next few days, especially as the Bulgarians were known to despise the Greeks and it was believed that they would never submit to a defeat at their hands without attempting a return match; elaborate defensive preparations were made, and the Greek troops were sent into the second lines to recuperate, and relieved by French units. But the counter-attack never materialized, and this was one of the first really significant signs of the enemy's depressed *moral*. From Field Marshal Hindenburg's memoirs and other sources we gather that the troops detailed for the counter-attack and for a general attack on the British lines had refused to march.

The operation had been admirably prepared by the French Staff, and the artillery concentrated in that area formed a formidable mass. Its objectives were almost more political than military, and full success having been achieved, it was very largely exploited and advertised. The battle of the Srka was indeed a strong encouragement for the Venizelist party in Greece, and public opinion came to have somewhat more confidence in the Greek Army. It seems almost paradoxical, but the Greeks themselves, who were ready to extol in the most exaggerated way the most modest successes of their troops, in their heart of hearts did not feel much confidence in them, and as a French officer said to me, they still believed that the Bulgarians trained by the Germans were worth more



than the Greeks trained by the French. But in one of those fits of sudden exaltation, characteristic of all Balkan peoples, the Greeks swerved from a belief in German invincibility and terror of a Bulgaro-German invasion to the absolute confidence in a complete and immediate Allied victory obtained by virtue of Greek aid. In the cafés of Athens there was little to choose between the Marne, Gorizia, the Somme, Brusiloff's offensive and the Srka di Legen.

But in spite of all exaggerations, we must remember that this was a really creditable episode; it exercised a favourable influence on the Greek mobilization, and showed that the Allies could count on at least a part of the Greek Army.

## CHAPTER XIII

### MARKING TIME. ARRIVAL OF GENERAL FRANCHET D'ESPÉREY

THE spring of 1918 had been the most menacing period for the Entente. At that time the first effects of the Russian collapse were felt on the Western front as they had been felt on the Italian front in October, 1917. On all fronts the Allies were standing still, held down without the possibility of attempting any offensive. The "war map" was wholly in favour of the Central Powers. Germany occupied almost the whole of Belgium, a large and rich part of France. The Austrians were on the Piave. Russia, after the shameful surrender of Brest-Litovsk, had seen the German and Austrian armies spread over a vast part of her territory. The Turks, after the withdrawal of the Russians from Armenia, had invaded the Caucasus. Roumania, betrayed by the Russians, had two-thirds of her territory occupied by the enemy, and after a heroic resistance on the Sereth, had been forced to submit to peace on disastrous terms. Now the Germans on the Western front and the Austrians in Italy were preparing new and vast offensives which should finally bring the struggle to an end with a colossal victory. The British, French and Italians hoped to be able to resist, but all were filled with deep anxiety. American assistance was arriving very slowly, while the defeatist propaganda, conducted by Socialists and others in the pay of Germany, was spreading secretly throughout all the Allied countries.

On March 21, the German offensive in France was launched and its successes were more rapid and more terrible than could have been expected. After a few

days all the territory laboriously conquered at the cost of enormous losses by the Allied forces in the spring and summer of 1917, were lost, and the enemy still advanced irresistibly towards Amiens, to separate the British from the French Armies. Immediately afterwards the offensive in Flanders began, which, although less rapid than the other, achieved menacing successes. In May there was another great German offensive on the Chemin des Dames, and in two days the enemy regained the ground won by the French in the preceding summer, and pushed much further on, crossing the Marne at several points and again threatening Paris. It seemed as though nothing could now hold up the overwhelming advance.

At this grave moment the Macedonian front was more neglected than ever, and the Army in the East was indeed made use of to provide reinforcements for the Western front. In the despairing search for effectives to fill up the gaps in the French front it was decided to withdraw certain units from the East. During the winter of 1917-18 the French Army in Macedonia had received sufficient reinforcements to bring the battalions up to a semblance of their organic strength. The total of the French Army which had been reduced to 180,000 men, had been again raised to 210,000. The British, too, received some reinforcements. We continued to maintain our own strength, except for the withdrawal of the 7th battalion in the summer of 1917, which I have already mentioned. But with the German offensive in France, the French and British Commands sent a commission to the East to examine the possibility of withdrawing troops, and it was decided to send to France the equivalent of 12 battalions from each of the two armies. From the British contingent, which comprised 12 brigades of 4 battalions each, one whole battalion per brigade was withdrawn; the French instead withdrew a corresponding number of men from various units, while a few regiments, whose strength had been greatly reduced, were broken up. This gave increasing importance to the Greek Army, which was in a position to supply the

Macedonian front with a number of men, not by any means equivalent in fighting quality or training to the French and British battalions withdrawn, but stronger in effectives. This decision was generally deplored, because 24 battalions represented a very negligible increase of strength on the French front where vast armies millions strong were engaged, whereas by withdrawing them from Macedonia they constituted a reduction of force which was anything but indifferent, and could not be compensated by even twice that number of Greek battalions; this made the situation of the Allied troops remaining at that front—our own included—much harder.

In the East, another result of the German offensive in France was the change in the Commander-in-Chief. General Guillaumat was very highly thought of in France, and rightly so. In Macedonia he had, as I have said, restored the shaken discipline of the French troops and had entirely reorganized them, but in the extremely critical situation in which Paris found itself in view of the German advance in May, it was decided to entrust him with the defence of the Capital, and consequently on June 8, he quietly departed from Salonica and was succeeded by General Franchet d'Espérey. The loss of the Chemin des Dames, where the latter had commanded an army, had not exactly caused him to fall into disgrace, because the defeat does not appear to have been due to any fault of his own, but it rendered him less highly considered than he had been before, and consequently he was sent to take command at Salonica, where it was not believed that important operations would ever take place again. General Franchet d'Espérey is a man of high historical and literary as well as military culture, he has travelled a great deal abroad and belongs to an aristocratic family; he is somewhat brusque in his manner, impulsive and sometimes dominated by the last incident which had happened and had put him in a good or bad humour with everybody. When he was in a good humour, he was gay, *bon camarade*, and one could tell him or ask him anything, whereas when something had gone amiss



he was irritable and difficult to deal with. For General Mombelli he had great sympathy, and even when our Commander had occasion to complain energetically about some deficiency in the services for which we were dependent on the C.A.A.—and occasions were not lacking—he always accepted his remarks in a friendly spirit and did everything that was possible to satisfy him. He did not enter into discussions on the various questions submitted to him and often made remarks that were not absolutely accurate, basing his opinion on something that he had read or heard without going into the matter thoroughly. But as a strategist he showed in Macedonia qualities of the highest rank, and he commanded with success the extremely mixed team of the Armée d'Orient.

General Guillaumat deserves credit for having thought out the Macedonian offensive, basing it on Voivod Michich's old plan of 1916, for the part which concerned him; General d'Espérey perfected the plan, completed it, and then carried it out.

The engagement on the Srka di Legen was the last on the Macedonian front before the great offensive, with the exception of a few small raids on many sectors. The British were particularly active during this period, both as regards raids in the Struma and in aerial bombardments. Whereas, until about the middle of 1917, the enemy were decidedly stronger than the Allies in the air, they had since then been steadily losing their superiority and finally found themselves in a state of absolute inferiority. The British were so constantly bringing down German machines that the enemy hardly dared any longer to appear in the air beyond their own lines.

There was now considerable activity in Albania in the sector where the Armée d'Orient co-operated with the Italian 16th Corps, and on May 15, a French column, commanded by Colonel Caré, composed of the 58th Battalion of Chasseurs à pied, 10 platoons of Albanian Gendarmerie, a battalion of the 372nd Infantry Regiment, 3 mountain batteries, and a regiment of Moroccan Spahis, plus a reserve of 7 Colonial companies, took the offensive between the junction of the Kelizoni and the Devoli

and the height of Mali Korori (south-west of Moschopolje); an Italian column was to deliver an attack at the same time from the line of the Osum, near Cerevoda. The object of the Allies was to reduce the strong enemy salient formed as a result of the French attack at Pogradetz, which penetrated wedge-like between the positions then captured and the Italian positions to the north and north-west of the Ersek road, menacing the Santi Quaranta road between Ersek and Koritza. The two attacks met with vigorous resistance, especially at the extreme left of the Italians and the extreme right of the French; both the Italians and the French captured some positions, lost them, and recaptured them definitely. Towards the centre the resistance was weaker. On the 17th the liaison between the two forces was realized at Backa, according to plan. Mount Lesetz alone (east of Protopapa and south of the Devoli) could not be captured by the French. A definite result was the elimination of the enemy salient, the reduction of the French and Italian front by about 40 kilometres, and the occupation of the numerous villages contained in the salient itself. The new lines went from the junction of the Devoli and the Kelizoni, passing by Tchafa Becit, Maya Frenkut, Backa to Cerevoda. Thus the Santi Quaranta road was now safe. The enemy made no attempt at a counter-offensive, save for artillery fire, and the Italians and French were able to reinforce the new lines unmolested.

On June 10 the French resumed the offensive, but this time without Italian co-operation, as the advance was not in that sector. Various positions were occupied, including Mount Lesetz, which they had been unable to capture in the preceding operation; a new line was constituted, reducing the enemy salient on Mount Kamia from Lungi to the old line near Tchafa Becit, passing along Hill 1900, Sinapremte, Gopes and Mount Tembët. The operation ended on the 14th; 400 prisoners, 10 guns and some machine guns having been captured.

The French and Italians resumed the offensive on a larger scale on July 6. The French objective was to advance along the valley of the Devoli as far as its great

loop at a short distance from the valley of the Skumbi, whereas ours was to turn the Malakastra—the best defended position in the whole of Albania—occupy Fieri and Berat and then push on towards the Skumbi. Both corps were to try to reach the Durazzo-Elbasan road, but the latter town was to be reserved for Italian occupation. The general objective was not so much territorial occupation as the weakening of the enemy, so as to prevent Austrian forces in Albania from coming to the assistance of the Bulgarians in Macedonia during the Allied offensive which was about to take place in the latter territory.

The French force, commanded by Colonel Foulon, comprised the 372nd Infantry Regiment, the 58th Battalion of Chasseurs à pied, the Spahis and three mountain batteries. The positions between the old line of the junction of the Devoli and the Tomoritzza were occupied without resistance, and so was the whole of the triangle formed by these two rivers and the chain of the Bofnia and Kosnitza mountains. The French pushed forward still further between the Devoli and Holta, occupied Gramsi, an important base of supplies for the enemy, on the 13th, and the Austrians withdrew to the heights east of Chekina, Strori and Kruya, to the south-west of the Tomoritzza where the Italians were operating, and the French and Italian liaison was being constantly advanced northwards. On the 15th, Lubin was taken, a little to the east of the confluence of the Devoli and the Tomoritzza.

But the Italians were also advancing towards Berat and Fieri. The latter town was captured as the result of a brilliant operation by the cavalry, which turned the extreme north-west spur of the Malakastra, while infantry detachments forced a passage between Levani and Fieri. Thus the whole enemy defensive organization of the Malakastra, the only one, it may be said, which the Austrians had created in Albania, fell. Beyond Fieri the Italians pressed on to the river Semeni, which they forced at the Metali bridge. Another column occupied Berat, the H.Q. of an Austrian brigade, and reached the southern loop of the Devoli.

During these operations a misunderstanding arose

between the Italian and French Commands, due probably to the imperfect liaison, communications being indeed very difficult, on account of the broken nature of the ground. Our Command wished to push forward in a northerly direction, as far as the apex of the loop of the Devoli, so as to occupy the whole of the mountain range of the Mali Siloves, which dominates the left bank of the river, while the French, in view of their weak effectives in Albania, were opposed to this advance which seemed to them too risky. The advance, however, was effected, and a part of the above mountain range was occupied, but the Austrian Supreme Command, alarmed by the rapid success of the various French and Italian offensives in Albania, the result of which had been not only an important strategic loss for them, but also a serious danger of insurrection on the part of the untrustworthy natives on account of the weakened Austrian prestige, and represented a menace in the direction of Montenegro, changed the Commander-in-Chief and sent out important reinforcements. General Pflanzer-Baltin flew by aeroplane to Albania, where he took command. At the same time the Italians were suffering terribly from malaria. The coastal zone of Albania is very unhealthy; as long as the troops remained in their camps or were making no great effort, they held out fairly well, but as soon as they began the advance and had to sleep in the open, often in marshy places, they were mown down by fever, especially the detachments operating along the lower Semeni. To give one instance, in a whole regiment of cavalry only 70 men were not on the sick list. From Italy no reinforcements arrived, because preparations in course made for the great offensive on the Italian front, which had originally been intended to take place in the month of August. Thus, when the enemy, in the second half of July, strengthened by large reinforcements arriving from healthy places and not yet infected by malaria, launched a counter-offensive, the Italian troops were forced to withdraw to some extent. This they did in good order and without serious losses in prisoners or material, and if the evacuation of Fieri and



Berat were regrettable episodes, our situation still remained far better than it had been before the offensive, as we maintained our positions on the heights to the south of those towns, and especially on the important lines of the Malakastra. Enemy pressure made itself felt also in the Mali Siloves area, where our column had to withdraw so as not to remain with its left flank uncovered. The French now opposed this withdrawal, as they did not believe in the existence of Austrian reinforcements, simply because the latter had not been seen in the French sector. This led to a disagreement between the two Commands, which, however, was soon settled, and the French column also withdrew a little further back. Our line was then stabilized as follows: Sinya (south-west of Berat)—Barguliasi—Tchafa Glunaka—Oyanik, where the French line began. The latter had abandoned a part of the triangle formed by the Tomoritza and the Devoli, but held the heights of Mount Kosnitza. Their line then followed the direction of Lungi and the Gora Top.<sup>1</sup> Towards the middle of August the operations in Albania were suspended. We were in positions easy to defend and the Austrians, exhausted by their advance, also began to feel the full effects of the climate in that season. Now they were no longer receiving any reinforcements, partly because the Italian Navy rendered transport from Dalmatia by sea almost impossible, while General Ferrero had been reinforced by two brigades and some other detachments from Italy.

In the second half of June there was a general *détente* in the European military situation. After the great German push in May, the operations in France had been suspended, and on the 15th of June the Austrians launched their offensive on the Piave. It failed completely, and the enemy did not succeed in retaining any part of the ground conquered in the first attack—in fact on the Lower Piave, they lost some which they had held since the previous November. This event had a repercussion on all fronts, and encouraged all the Allies, because it was the first great Allied victory in 1918, and also the

<sup>1</sup> By line in the Albanian sector, whether Italian or French, I do not mean a continuous line of trenches, but merely a series of isolated posts.

first time that a vast offensive, launched with all the apparatus of modern warfare, was held up at once without achieving even the smallest lasting advantage. On the Macedonian front, too, the effect of it was felt in the shape of signs of exhaustion on the part of the enemy. Deserters were ever more numerous, and they were unanimous in stating that the causes of their desertion were the difficulty of supply due by the continuous requisitions of foodstuffs by Germany in Bulgaria to be sent to Germany, the fact that the Bulgarians, having obtained all the territories they wanted, were not anxious to go fighting simply for the convenience of Germany, and the general lack of confidence in the victory of the latter. This corresponded with the information obtained from the interior of Bulgaria, where the pro-German policy of King Ferdinand and the Radoslavoff Ministry were becoming every day more unpopular. The Cabinet fell in June and was succeeded by that of M. Malinoff, who was of pacifist tendencies. There was also a party in the country more or less in favour of the Entente, and now it was working hard to convince public opinion that it was possible, if peace were made with the Allies, to obtain recognition of Bulgaria's right to the conquered territory as a reward.

In Great Britain there had been since the early days of Bulgaria's intervention, a party in favour of making concessions to Bulgaria with the object of inducing her to abandon the Central Empires. Apart from the Bulgrophil movement, the Buxton brothers had always supported Bulgarian claims as a sentimental memory of the struggle of the Bulgarians against the Turks, when the latter dominated Macedonia and Thrace, and even in Government spheres this tendency had its supporters. As early as August, 1917, a British officer of high rank, who expressed the ideas of Government circles in his country and in Paris, told me that both in France and Britain people were convinced of the advisability of offering very advantageous concessions to Bulgaria, and there was talk of granting to her the Serbian part of Eastern Macedonia as far as the Vardar, excluding Uskub,

but, perhaps, including Monastir, the Greek part of Eastern Macedonia as far as the Struma, the Dobrugia up to the frontiers existing before the Balkan War, and further generous pecuniary compensation in addition; the Serbians would be indemnified by means of other territories at the expense of Austro-Hungary. In any case the Serbian population, according to this officer, were so weakened and reduced by five years of uninterrupted warfare, that it would not have been in a position to govern Southern Macedonia, where the population is mostly Bulgarian in feeling and opposed to Serbian rule. According to him, it only remained to convince the Italian Government of the possibility and advisability of this policy.

On the other hand, there were also pro-Serbian tendencies amongst the British, which strongly opposed any idea of conferring favours on the Bulgarians. Another British officer, occupying an important position in connexion with Serbia, told me that the attitude of those who wished to make such concessions at the expense of Serbia was the cause of very injurious consequences in Serbian circles, where such a tendency was regarded as nothing less than treachery against those who had fought from the beginning on the side of the Allies, and had suffered terribly, especially at the hands of those very Bulgarians whom it was now proposed to reward.

I know that some definite proposals were made to the Bulgarians, and in any case it is certain that the idea of a separate peace with her, to be obtained in this way, was in the air. In June, 1918, General Bartlett, the United States Military Attaché at Athens, came to Salonica, and it was believed that his presence there had something to do with the rumours of the possible intervention of the United States in the Balkans. America had never declared war against Turkey or Bulgaria and had no troops in Macedonia, and although Turkey had immediately broken off diplomatic relations with her, diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and America continued through the whole of the war, and an American Chargé d'Affaires continued to reside



at Sofia. There was much speculation in the Entente countries as to the reasons for this attitude on the part of the United States, and even in America the public could not understand it. In the spring of 1918 some members of the American House of Representatives and of the Senate had presented a motion to Congress in favour of a declaration of war against those two States, but President Wilson requested the authors of that motion to suspend all discussion on the subject, without giving any reason for his request, and nothing more was said about the matter. The above-mentioned general had come to Salonica to call on General Franchet d'Espérey and the other Allied Commanders, and he visited various sectors of the front, including our own. Although he maintained the utmost reserve regarding the attitude of his country in connexion with Bulgaria, he ended by saying that in America it was believed that the cause of the Allies in the East might be better served by keeping the threat of declaring war against Bulgaria hanging like the sword of Damocles over the head of that State, instead of actually declaring it. In fact, Bulgaria strongly desired to avoid a break with the United States; she now began to realize that the defeat of the Central Empires was possible if not probable, and she hoped to see the United States at the future Peace Conference, if not as a friend, at least as a benevolent neutral who would defend her from the extreme retribution of the Allies, especially of Serbia, Roumania and Greece. In the meanwhile, Mr. Murphy, the American Chargé d'Affaires at Sofia was able to conduct an active, although prudent propaganda, in favour of a separate peace, hinting that the sooner the Bulgarians abandoned the now hopeless cause of the Central Empires, the better would be the conditions which the Entente would offer them.

The shrewdest observers of the Balkan situation did not yet believe in the possibility of a Bulgarian secession, and to many it seemed unjust to sacrifice Serbia or Roumania in favour of Bulgaria. Some concessions might have been offered her at the expense of Turkey, but it should not be forgotten that even



with Turkey the possibility of a separate peace was contemplated, and this was not conceivable if the concession of Turkish territories to Bulgaria were to be the object of negotiations. As long as Greece was under Constantine, neutral, and pro-German, the possibility of giving Bulgaria some Greek territory in Eastern Macedonia might be considered—Cavalla, Drama, Serres, etc.—but the Bulgarians already occupied these places, and from the moment that Greek soldiers had begun to co-operate with the Allies, such proposals could not be entertained without the consent of Greece, who would never have given it. General Mombelli was convinced that the talk about separate peace with Bulgaria had no serious foundation and that the Bulgarians would never decide to take the fatal step until they were first convinced of the marked superiority of the Allies; they had not yet that absolute conviction, and it was therefore necessary to persuade them by means of a military defeat. General Franchet d'Espérey was of the same way of thinking, and he told the writer that the Bulgarians would be more likely to abandon their Allies "après la pile que je vais leur flanquer quand mes préparatifs seront terminés."

The French national fête of the 14th of July was celebrated in Salonica with special solemnity, and King Alexander of Greece was also present. In spite of the weak effectives available and the limited space, the spectacle proved fairly imposing and made a good impression on the public. The feeling of victory was now in the air. Our success on the Piave had raised the *moral* of all the Allies, and on July 15th the last German offensive was launched, which after three days of small successes, was repulsed by the great counter-offensive of Marshal Foch beginning on the 18th. I remember that when I congratulated a French General on this victory, he replied: "Mais ce sont les Italiens sur le Piave que nous ont donné le premier exemple."

## CHAPTER XIV

### ON THE EVE OF THE OFFENSIVE

As soon as General Franchet d'Espérey reached Salonica he undertook to execute the offensive planned by his predecessor. But he encountered very decided opposition on the part of his own Government, as well as on that of the other Allied Governments. The former did not believe in the possibility of a successful offensive on the Macedonian front, and it seems not to have had too much confidence in General Franchet d'Espérey himself. It refused to send him reinforcements, and limited itself to supplying him grudgingly with some artillery and other material, but always in insufficient quantities. Britain and Italy adopted a similar policy. Nevertheless he insisted on the advisability of making the attempt. Two months were needed for the preparations, and in spite of the opposition of the Governments, he at once took them in hand. During the month of July at the Allied Councils many members were doubtful, and believed that better results might be obtained by attempting to secure a separate peace with Bulgaria. The diplomatic and military commission before breaking up ordered General Franchet d'Espérey to go ahead with his preparations, but forbade him to commence the offensive without a definite authorization from the Governments. At the beginning of August nothing had yet been decided, and the British and Italian Governments were still opposed to the idea of an offensive. General Guillaumat in Paris had supported the projected operation in his conversation with members of the French Government and had succeeded in convincing M. Clemenceau. At the beginning of September he went to London

and Rome to speak in favour of the plan, but it was not until September 11th that the Commander-in-Chief in Salonica was authorized to attack when he thought it advisable. There was, however, so little confidence in the success of the plan that General Guillaumat, who then had no Command, had instructions to hold himself in readiness to proceed to Macedonia by aeroplane to relieve General Franchet d'Espérey in case of failure.

Let us now see what were the respective conditions of the two opposing armies. The enemy front was divided geographically into four sectors — Albania, Monastir, Vardar-Doiran, and Struma—against any one of which the attack might be launched. The Albanian sector offered some advantages, inasmuch as it was less provided with defensive works. But General Franchet d'Espérey did not wish to begin operations on a large scale in that area because the Italian XVI Corps was not under his orders; moreover, and this was the principal reason, communications were so difficult there as to render the transport of troops in large numbers impossible. An advocate of the action of the French G.H.Q. states that General Ferrero refused to make use of Essad Pasha for the operations in Albania, and almost blames him for it,<sup>1</sup> but General Franchet d'Espérey had no more confidence in the assistance which that shady adventurer might afford to the cause of the Allies than had General Ferrero, and they were both right.<sup>2</sup>

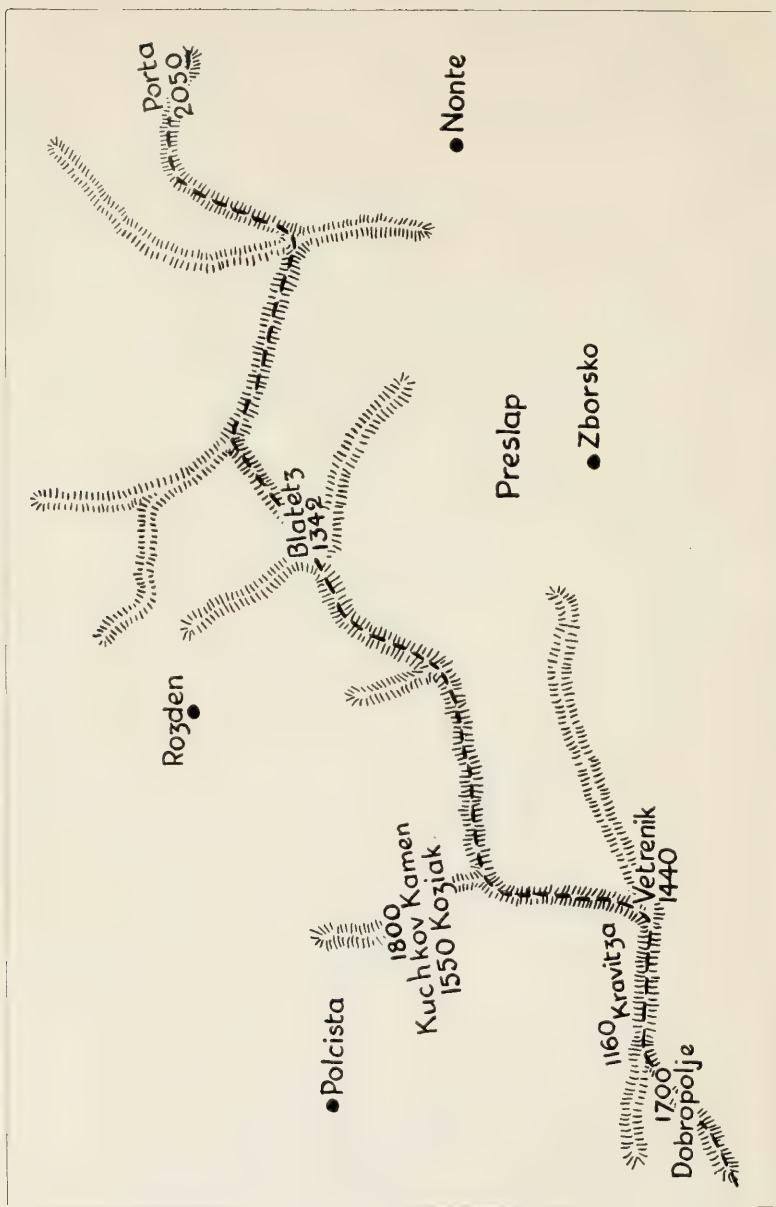
In the Monastir sector it was possible to attack in the direction of Pribilei-Kichevo-Gostivar-Kalkandelen (Tetovo), or towards Prilep-Babuna-Veles, or Prilep-Gradsko-Negotin. But here the enemy defences were in the highest possible state of efficiency, and as this was one of the sectors in which an attack was always expected, the Bulgaro-Germans held themselves constantly in readiness for it. The same objections applied

<sup>1</sup> Constantin Photindes, "La Victoire des Alliés en Orient," *Revue de Paris*, September 15, 1919.

<sup>2</sup> General F. d'Espérey himself, in reply to a question from his Government as to the strength of Essad's army, telegraphed that it consisted of 13 men.







AREA OF THE FRANCO-SERB GROUP.

to the Vardar-Doiran area, which has always been one of the traditional routes for Macedonian invasions, and was the only one provided with a railway throughout its whole length.

The Struma sector extended along a very broad and marshy valley, and the enemy positions on the mountains east of the river were extremely strong. Moreover, a success in this direction would not have offered the chance of striking a blow at the heart of the enemy, such as was necessary to obtain really decisive results.

The vital centre of the enemy defences was the middle Vardar. From Uskub, from Veles, and from Gradsko, all their lateral communications spread out fan-wise. The Vardar railway put them in direct communication with the Central Empires and their supply centres. From Uskub there was a branch railway to Kalkandelen, whence a road, with a *décauville* along a part of it, descended into the plain of Monastir. From Veles and Gradsko all the troops in the area between Prilep and the Vardar, and to some extent also those immediately to the east of the river, were supplied. The enemy, however, counted on the very powerful defences, natural and artificial, on both sides of it, in the Demir Kapu gorge, to the west of Lake Doiran, and on the Beles range.

There was, however, another route which the enemy had not thought of fortifying, relying on its formidable natural defences. Between the Cerna and Nonte there is a group of high peaks rising from a wilderness of rocks around a basin hidden among the mountains. The area is called the Moglena, and it is here that the Moglenitza river has its source. The mountains of this group are among the highest in Macedonia; several summits, such as Floka, Kaimakchalan, Dzena, are over 2,000 m., the Mala Rupa is over 1,900 m., Sokol, Dobropolje, Vetrenik, Kuchkov Kamen and Kravitza are about 1,700–1,800 m. In the offensive of the autumn of 1916 the Serbs had conquered the Kaimakchalan range and the Moglena area, which was afterwards entrusted to the II Serbian Army. Since then the sector had been a peaceful one, except for the engagements in the spring

of 1917. Voivod Michich had repeatedly insisted on the advisability of an offensive against the Dobropolje, as offering the best chances of success. General Sarrail had refused to trust the man who knew far more about Balkan warfare than he did. General Guillaumat, on the other hand, believed the plan to be possible, and began the preliminary studies for an operation in that direction. But more and heavier artillery was needed than the Armée d'Orient as yet possessed. Guillaumat, therefore, only executed the attack on the Srka di Legen. To General Franchet d'Espérey is due the merit of having taken up the plan once more, perfected it and finally executed it. As a result of his inspections along the front, he convinced himself that while the vital ganglion of the whole enemy organization was the middle Vardar, an attack on any of the four traditional sectors was, with the means at his disposal, impossible. From Mount Floka he studied the conditions of the ground with minute attention, and realized that a surprise attack in the Moglena area might succeed, because the Bulgars were not likely to expect it. It was necessary to break through in the centre, and once the breach was made to spread out in a fan-like formation to reach Gradsko and Demir Kapu, thus cutting the enemy's communications and separating the XI German Army from the I Bulgarian Army. At the same time powerful diversive actions on the right and left wings (Doiran sector and Cerna loop) would nail down the enemy and prevent them from sending reinforcements to the centre.

To carry out this plan it was indispensable to concentrate a mass of powerful artillery in the central area, have strong reserves, and at the same time hold the vast line throughout the whole of its length. The scheme appeared impossible owing to the absence of one of these requisites—the reserves. But General Franchet d'Espérey—and this was the touch of genius of his conception—created the reserves out of nothing, by thinning out his line and reducing the number of troops on all the other sectors to the minimum indispensable for safety and sometimes going dangerously below it, so as to concentrate the

largest possible number of men on the points where the decisive effort was to be made. In this way, although the total strength of the Allies was slightly below that of the enemy, he managed to have an overwhelming superiority at the points where he attacked.

The following were the forces of the Armée d'Orient. It comprised: 8 French divisions (30th, 57th, 76th, 122nd and 156th Metropolitan Divisions, and 11th, 16th and 17th Colonial Divisions), one cavalry group (1st and 4th Chasseurs d'Afrique and Morocco Spahis), some units not forming part of any division (2nd bis Zouaves, 58th Battalion of Chasseurs à pied, various battalions of Senegalese, Algerians, Annamites, etc.); one Italian division equal to rather more than two French divisions, and including two squadrons of cavalry and other units; 4 British divisions (22nd, 26th, 27th and 28th), each with some cavalry detachments, and the 228th Garrison Brigade; 6 Serbian infantry divisions (Shumadia, Danube, Morava, Yugoslav, Drina and Timok) and one cavalry division; 10 Greek divisions (Archipelago, Crete and Serres of the National Defence Army, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 9th, 13th and 14th of the regular army), of whom one—the 9th—was not trained and was never sent to the front throughout the operations, and some cavalry; finally a few Albanian detachments.<sup>1</sup> In all there were  $29\frac{1}{2}$  divisions, of which the British, Serbian, Greek and the 5 Metropolitan French divisions comprised 9 battalions each, the French Colonial ones 12 each, and the Italian 18. The total strength was as follows:

	Divisions	Battalions	Infantry Strength	Rifles
French.....	8	87	200,000	45,000
British .....	$4\frac{1}{2}$	40	135,000	32,000
Italians .....	1	18	44,000	10,000
Serbs .....	6	57	95,000	30,000
Greeks .....	10	84	100,000	40,000
Total .....	$29\frac{1}{2}$	286	574,000	157,000

The Allied artillery amounted to 1,600 guns, the machine guns were 2,680, the aeroplanes 200.

<sup>1</sup> These had nothing to do with Essad Pasha, but were local levies raised and trained by the French or under leaders friendly to the Allies.



The total number of enemy battalions was somewhat less than that of the Allies (282), but their effectives were stronger—they amounted to about 700,000 men, including 204,000 rifles, while the men who could be regarded as combatants were 400,000. Their artillery was weaker as regards the number of guns (1,300). Until a few months previously they had been far stronger in artillery, but during the summer the Germans had withdrawn many of their batteries from the Eastern front and sent them to France, whereas the Allied artillery had been steadily strengthened. The enemy, however, still retained a larger number of heavy and medium calibre guns than we had, as well as several guns of greater calibre and range than anything on our side. Their machine guns were 2,530, and their aeroplanes only 80.

In view of the Allies' inferiority in numbers, an attack could be delivered only by concentrating large forces on one point, and leaving the other sectors to be held by weak forces or by Greek troops of uncertain value.

General Franchet d'Espérey began by forming a new Army Group, called the Central Franco-Serbian Group, concentrated in the Moglena area. He withdrew from the Serbian front the Danube and Shumadia divisions, leaving the other four, reinforced by two French divisions—the 122nd (General Topard) and the 17th Colonial (General Pruneau)—attached to the II Serbian Army, by 13 heavy batteries and 30 trench guns, besides several flights of aeroplanes, engineer detachments, etc. He had asked for and obtained fresh technical material from France. The whole group was commanded by Voivod Michich. The Commander-in-Chief had decided on this plan as early as the end of June, and had devoted the following two and a half months to the necessary preparations. New roads and décauvilles had to be constructed, heavy artillery transported to a height of 1,800 metres, new aviation camps laid out, certain units specially trained. The 17th Colonial and the 122nd Divisions did not take over their sectors until the beginning of September. Although all movements

were carried out at night, the enemy became aware that something was in preparation. In order to deceive them as to the point where the attack was to be delivered, a number of raids were carried out on various sectors.

The general distribution was as follows: The A.F.O. (General Henrys) from the river Tomoritzza in Albania to a point between the Cerna and Gradesnitza; it comprised the 30th, 76th, 57th and 156th French Divisions and several minor units not forming part of any division, between the Tomoritzza and the western end of the Cerna loop, the 35th Italian Division from that point to a point a little to the west of Makovo, while the line from hence to a point just beyond the east end of the Cerna loop was held by the 11th French Colonial Division and the 3rd Greek Division. Here began the area of the Franco-Serb group (Voivod Michich), with the Drina and Morava Divisions of the I Army to the left and the Yugoslav and Timok Divisions of the II Army to the left, reinforced by the 122nd and 17th French Divisions, extending as far as the neighbourhood of Nonte. To the right of the Serbs, was the area of the I Group of Divisions (General d'Anselme) reaching to the Vardar and comprising the 16th French Colonial Division, the Greek Archipelago Division and for a short time the 27th British. East of the Vardar was the British Army (General Milne), with the XII Corps, commanded by General Wilson, comprising the 22nd and 26th British Divisions, the 2nd bis Zouaves Regiment and the Greek Serres Division, west of Lake Doiran, and the XVI Corps (General Briggs) east of the lake, comprising the 28th British Division and Greek Cretan Division. From Lake Butkova to the sea the sector was held by the I Greek Corps (General Ioannou), under the orders of the British Commander-in-Chief, comprising the 1st, 2nd and 13th Divisions. The 4th and 14th Greek Divisions constituted a reserve for the British Army, and the 9th was still in training near Florina.

In the central sector, where the attack was to be first launched, the distribution was as follows: The I Serbian Army held a front of  $16\frac{1}{2}$  km. from the river Lesnitza

to the Sokol, with the Danube and Drina Divisions in the first line and the Morava behind the centre. The II Army held a front of 17 km. from the Sokol to the river Sushitza, with the French 122nd and 17th Colonial to the left, the Shumadia to the right, the Yugoslav and the Timok in reserve. On the whole Franco-Serbian front were concentrated 36,000 rifles, 2,000 light machine guns, 81 aeroplanes and 600 guns—more than a third of the whole artillery of the Armée d'Orient and almost the whole of its heavy artillery, so that other sectors were stripped to a dangerous degree. These 600 guns comprised 8 batteries of short 120 mm., 17 of short 155 mm., 4 of long 105 mm., 3 of long 120 mm., 5 of long 155 mm., 48 of 75 mm. field guns, 35 of 65 mm. mountain guns, 72 trench mortars of 58 mm., and 12 of 240 mm. Thus the Allies had, on this sector, an overwhelming artillery superiority over the enemy.

The plan of operations provided for an initial destructive barrage to wreck the enemy's first line defences opposite the II Serbian Army; then their artillery positions were to be bombarded and reinforcements prevented from coming up; finally, when a breach for the II Army was made, the artillery was to alter its direction and open up another gap for the I Army. The duty of the infantry was to try to capture all the positions between the Sokol and the Vetrenik, so as to penetrate as deeply as possible into the enemy's lines in the direction of the apex of the triangle formed by the Cerna and the Vardar. If this plan succeeded, the enemy's communications to the right and the left would be threatened. In a second phase the British XII Corps was to attack the two Couronnés and the P ridges to the west of Lake Doiran, while the XVI Corps was to attempt to turn the positions to the north-east of the lake, so as to threaten the road leading into Bulgaria by the Kosturino Pass and Strumitza. Above all it was to be the task of the British to prevent the enemy opposing them from sending reinforcements to the Serbian front, just as our forces were to fulfil a similar function on the Hill 1050 sector. Indeed, the best troops of the whole of the enemy Army were those

opposite the British and the Italian sectors. In the third phase the Italians were to attack the famous 1050, with Prilep as their objective, while the Franco-Greek Group to our right was to advance along the Cerna. In the fourth phase the rest of the A.F.O. would enter the lists, attacking the positions around Monastir, also with Prilep as their objective. The final phase was to be an offensive by the I Greek Corps beyond the Struma, with a view to capturing Serres, Demir Hissar and the Rupel road leading into Bulgaria towards Djumaya. In view of the weakness of the effectives, it would be necessary to transfer the scanty available reserves and the artillery from one sector to another, and the various phases of the action were so arranged as to give those forces time to effect the movements contemplated—by no means an easy task on account of the state of communications in Macedonia.

It must be borne in mind that the objectives which General Franchet d'Espérey originally had in view were relatively modest, and many of his subordinate Commanders doubted that even these could be fully attained. The idea, even of the most optimistic, was that the Bulgarian first lines would probably be broken through, but that the enemy would offer a desperate resistance on the second and third lines, and that it would then be necessary for the Allies to entrench themselves again in new positions for another long period of waiting. The Commanders of the different Allied contingents, therefore, made superhuman efforts to collect all the necessary material with the object of reconstituting the defences on the new advanced lines which they expected to occupy. The scarcity of barbed wire was a source of grave anxiety for all Commands, and Staff officers lay awake at night wondering how on earth the troops could entrench themselves after having abandoned all the barbed wire in front of their present positions.

The Serbs alternated between the most unlimited hopes and the blackest pessimism. A great many of them doubted the possibility of breaking through the Vetrenik-Dobropolje line, while on the other hand the



officers of the Serbian G.H.Q. openly declared that an offensive which did not result in an advance beyond Uskub would be an irreparable disaster, because the Army would suffer such losses that, if the troops did not re-enter Old Serbia, it would be impossible to fill up the gaps and they would be incapable of carrying out any more operations. General Franchet d'Espérey himself, to judge by his statements, did expect to strike a formidable blow at the Bulgarians and thus render them inclined to conclude a separate peace, to which the Allied victories in France and the fact that neither the Germans nor the Austro-Hungarians were now in a position to send help to their satellites in the East, would contribute. But even he did not dream of a complete and overwhelming victory.

There were no important changes in the enemy distribution on the eve of the offensive. The Commander-in-Chief was still General von Scholtz, with his G.H.Q. at Uskub. The Bulgarian Army was temporarily commanded by General Todoroff, the effective Commander-in-Chief, General Gekoff, being under treatment in an Austrian clinique. The enemy forces opposed to the Allies comprised three armies and part of a fourth, plus some ten Austro-Hungarian battalions on their extreme right, between the Tomoritzza river and the Gora Top, belonging to General Pflanzer-Baltin's force in Albania. The area from the Gora Top to Nonte was held by the XI German Army, commanded by General von Steuben, with headquarters at Prilep; this comprised two German army corps—the LXII from the Gora Top to the west end of the Cerna loop and the LXI from thence to a point north-west of Staravina—and the 2nd and 3rd Bulgarian Divisions. The XLII Corps comprised the Mixed Division (from the Gora Top to the Lake of Prespa), the 6th Division (as far as Magarevo), and the 1st (as far as the west end of the Cerna loop). The LXI comprised the 302nd German Division, composed of German and Bulgarian battalions (from the Cerna west to Makovo, i.e. opposite the Italians) and the 4th (as far as Staravina). The 2nd Division

extended to the Dobropolje, and the 3rd to Nonte. The I Bulgarian Army, commanded by General Nerezoff, with headquarters at Valandovo, held the line from Nonte to Gornji Poroj (between Lakes Doiran and Butkova, and comprised the 5th Division (to the Vardar), the 9th (to Lake Doiran), and two more regiments taken from the 5th at the extreme left. The II Bulgarian Army, commanded by General Lukoff, whose headquarters were at Livunovo, extended to Lake Tahinos, and comprised the 11th (as far as the Struma east of Lake Butkova), the 7th as far as Serres, and the 8th to Lake Tahinos. Besides these forces there were various detachments of the IV Army, also called the Ægean Defence Force, with its headquarters at Xanthi, holding the line as far as Dede-Agatch—10th and 14th Divisions and several regiments of Militia.

The communications of the Allies were as follows: (1) The railway from Salonica to Monastir, which operated as far as Armenohor (Florina) for troops and to Sakulevo for goods; occasionally a train went into Monastir at night, but the last section of the line was still under enemy fire. (2) The Vardar railway from Salonica to a point south of Ghevgheli. (3) The Constantinople railway from Salonica to Lake Doiran; the section from Doiran to the Demir Hissar bridge (blown up by the French in 1916) was between the British and Bulgarian lines and therefore useless. (4) The branch line between Karasuli on N 2 and Kilindir on N 3. (5) A short branch line built by the British during the war, from Salonica to Guvesne on the Serres road. (6) The line from the station of Salonica across the town to Mikra Bay. There were many décauvilles, some of them very long, which rendered most valuable services. The following were the most important: Florina-Armensko (in the direction of Albania) unfinished, but continued with a telepherie to the Pisoderi Pass; Sakulevo-Brod with an extension towards the Italian front and another towards that of the I Serbian Army; Vertekop (on the Monastir railway) to the II Serbian Army front; Sarigöl-Janesh, with branches towards the British XII Corps front; several along the Struma,

north-west of Lake Tahinos; one from Arakli to the British trenches beyond the Struma, south of that lake. Many excellent roads had been built throughout the *Zone des Armées*, except in the Franco-Albanian area and in that of the II Serbian Army, where communications were very deficient, owing to the extremely broken nature of the ground, but in the latter area several new roads had been built, as we have seen, in view of the coming offensive.

To sum up, the troops of the A.F.O. and of the I Serbian Army were supplied by the Monastir railway as far as Florina and Sakulevo, by the Florina-Armensko décauville and the Pisoderi telepheric, and the Sakulevo-Brod décauville with its extensions; the II Serbian Army by the railway as far as Vertekop and thence by décauville; the I Group of Divisions by the Vardar railway to Karasuli and thence by road; the British XII Corps by rail to Sarigöl and Kilindir and thence by décauville; the British XVI Corps, as long as it was on the Struma, by rail to Guvesne and thence by road to the Struma, whence a décauville reached various sectors; the brigade on the lower Struma, by rail to Arakli and thence by décauville. When the XVI Corps was moved to the area east of Lake Doiran, it was supplied by the same routes as the XII Corps, while the communications to the Struma now served the Greek I Corps. Everywhere the inadequacy of the railways was made good by the excellent M.T. services, and this not only for the areas where there were no railways at all, because the motor lorries helped to intensify transport even towards sectors served by railways, the carrying capacity of the latter being wholly inadequate to the immense needs of the armies. The British and French had several thousand lorries, we had about 400, the Greeks and Serbs were supplied by French and British lorries.

If communications between the base at Salonica and the various sectors of the front had been rendered fairly satisfactory, lateral communications were extremely difficult, and this was particularly felt during the September offensive, when it was frequently necessary



(though not so often as was expected beforehand) to transfer troops and artillery from one sector to another.

The enemy's communications were the following : The vital artery of the whole army was the Belgrade-Nish-Uskub-Veles-Ghevgheli railway, with a branch from Uskub to Kalkandelen (Tetovo). The Nish-Sofia-Constantinople line supplied the troops further east. From the former, several décauilles and telepherics branched off. The most important was the one from Gradsko to Prilep, whence others extended to all the chief points of that area. Prilep, in fact, was a sort of Clapham Junction for décauilles, with an imposing station. From Radomir on the Sofia-Kutstendil-Guyeshevo railway there was a very long décauville to the Demir Hissar bridge, which supplied almost the whole of the II Army. The enemy was richer in décauilles than we were, but their road system was much poorer. As they had few lorries, and these without rubber tyres, the iron wheels reduced the roads to an appalling state. The Bulgarian Army made great use of the peasants' ox-carts and of mules and small mountain ponies. On the whole the enemy's transport was inadequate. Their only advantage was the possibility of obtaining supplies from Central Europe by rail. Salonica, it is true, was nearer to the Allied front than Belgrade, Nish or Sofia to that of the enemy, but the sea passage to Salonica was still exposed to submarine dangers, and tonnage was scarce, especially in the summer of 1918, on account of the transport of American troops to France. The enemy could, moreover, obtain reinforcements from the German garrisons in Roumania and from the depots in Bulgaria. What the Allies did not know was how far the Germans could reduce their garrisons in Roumania and whether the Bulgarians were still provided with abundant reserves. The Bulgarian battalions at the front were much stronger than those of the Allies, but according to information obtained by the Allied intelligence services it appeared that the depots were almost empty and that there were not more than three or four Bulgarian militia regiments available in Serbia or Bulgaria to be sent to the front.



The conditions of the Germans in Roumania and South Russia were even less well known. The Bulgarian *moral* was, as we have seen, becoming even more depressed. War weariness was spreading and led to increased desertions, and in a few cases to mutiny. The German troops which served to stiffen the Bulgarians had been greatly reduced, and relations between the two were by no means too friendly.

What was certain was that neither the French, the British nor the Italian Commands intended to send out another man to Macedonia, so that the C.A.A. must count exclusively on the troops actually in the country for the coming struggle. The Italian forces in Albania being about equal to those of the Austrians, there was no likelihood of reinforcements being available on either side.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE BATTLE OF THE BALKANS

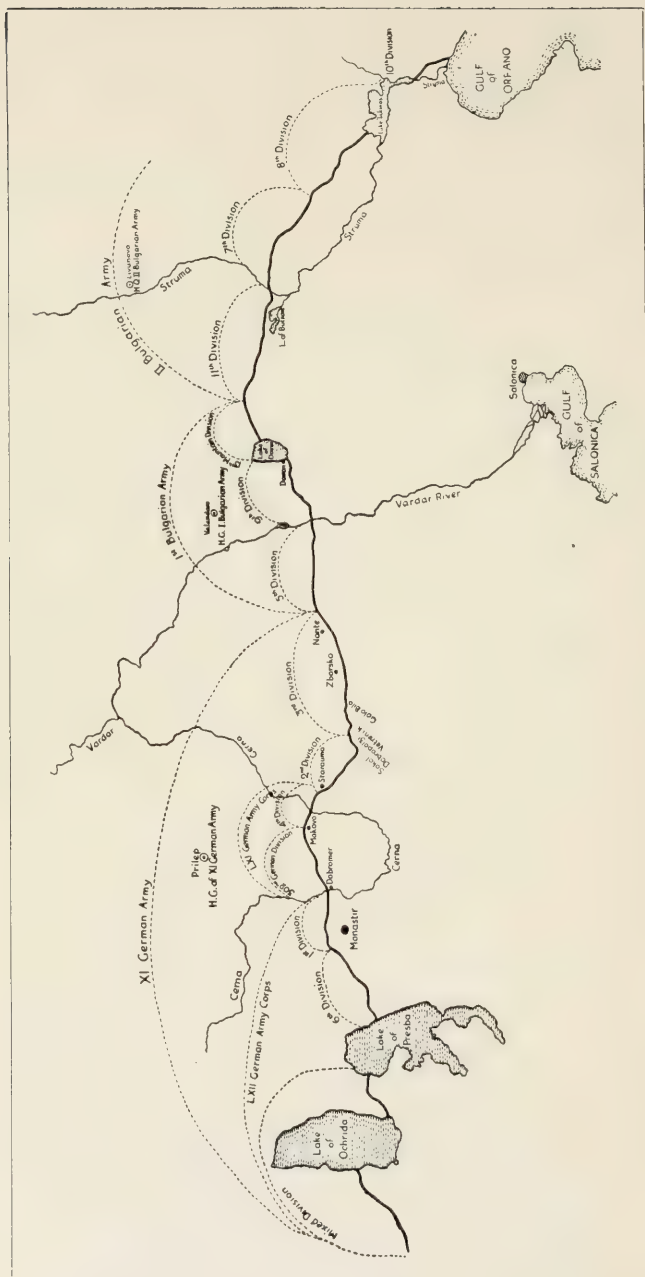
THE C.A.A. had succeeded in keeping the secret of its plan of operations up to the very last moment. The enemy, who dominated the lines of access on many parts of the front, could see that an offensive was in preparation, but, according to statements of prisoners and deserters, it had no precise idea as to the front or fronts where the attack was to be launched. It appears that only on September 14th they were convinced that the Serbian sector had been selected, but then it was too late to take precautions. The uncertainty which had reigned until that day had left them hesitating as to which area needed reinforcements. On the 14th, at eight o'clock, a heavy destructive barrage was opened on the enemy lines opposite the Franco-Serb positions. The following morning, at 5.30, the French infantry (122nd Division) advanced to the attack against the enemy positions on the Dobropolje. The enemy's barrage fire began too late, and after two hours of hard fighting the Dobropolje fell. The French had lost 700 men, losses which were largely due to the failure of the Serbian infantry to co-operate. General Topard, commanding the division, now pushed forward against Hill 1765, behind Dobropolje, where the enemy still resisted, and in the early hours of the afternoon even that position was captured. Further to the left the enemy held out on the Sokol, where the bombardment had not yet destroyed the defences. But its capture was indispensable for the movement of the I Serbian Army, which was to commence on the following day; the Serbians were so much impressed by the difficulties, that the French had to act alone. Two battalions of the French 148th Regiment did not succeed

in reaching the summit of the mountain, so that a third was sent up to reinforce them. The soldiers descended into the valley of the Matova, and, mounted on mules belonging to the divisional train, rapidly reached the positions of the first battalion, which renewed the attack, and at 21 hours the Sokol fell. To the right the 17th Colonial Division and the Serbian Shumadia Division took the Kravitza-Vetrenik group, advancing in broken order. The Serbians, creeping from rock to rock, reached the Slonovo Uvo at seven o'clock. In the afternoon they were on the eastern and western slopes of Vetrenik and near the Shlen and the Golo Bilo, where they were joined by the 17th Division on the left. The 17th Division deployed on the plateau of the Kravitza, in spite of the vigorous resistance of the enemy, who, having been reinforced, counter-attacked rapidly, but at 15.30 hours, the highest point of the Kravitza was occupied and the Bulgarian defenders captured or destroyed. In the evening, at 21 hours, the whole of the Sokol-Dobropolje-Kravitza-Vetrenik fortified system was in the hands of the Allies, and the great breach was made. The losses had not been very heavy, 1,700 French, of whom 1,200 of the 17th Division and 500 of the 122nd Division, and 200 Serbs.

It was necessary to develop this success at once so as to widen the breach, and in the night of the 15th-16th the I Serbian Army (General Boyovich) came into action, while Voivod Stepanovich pushed forward the Yugoslav and Timok Divisions, which had been hitherto kept in reserve, beyond the lines occupied by the assaulting divisions; this he was able to do because General Franchet d'Espérey had insisted that they should be kept close at hand, although the Serbian Command wished to leave them much further back. At 15.45 hours the Timok Division passed beyond the outposts of the 17th Colonial Division, and as the trenches captured corresponded roughly to the Greco-Serb frontier, the Serbian troops made a demonstration of sympathy to the French, whose splendid victorious effort had enabled them to re-enter their fatherland. The same day the







ENEMY ORDER OF BATTLE, SEPTEMBER 15, 1918.

Yugoslav Division, after a long march, attacked on the Koziak (Hill 1550, north of the Vetrenik), captured Hills 1810 and 1825, lost the former in consequence of a counter-attack delivered by Bulgarian reinforcements which had just arrived, but recaptured it definitely. To the extreme left, the Franco-Serb Group and the 1st Group of Divisions came into action with the attack of the 16th Colonial Division on Zborsko, where the trenches to the west were captured, but the enemy managed to hold the village. In the night of the 16th-17th, on the left of the I Serbian Army, the advance of the 11th Colonial Division began, together with elements of the 3rd Greek Division; while to the right and left of the Cerna (east) a battalion of Senegalese occupied Staravina, the Greeks occupied Zovik.

The next objective to be reached was the Vardar at its confluence with the Cerna, so as to occupy not only the whole of the triangle formed by the two rivers, but to threaten the communications of the enemy troops south of Monastir and in the Cerna loop, as well as on Lake Doiran. The II Serbian Army pushed on towards the lower valley, crossed the Cerna, with the Morava Division (in reserve) between the two, and the 11th Colonial Division advanced echeloned obliquely so as to occupy as great a part as possible of the area to the right of the Cerna. The enemy grasped the seriousness of the situation, and the Command of the XI German Army gave orders to resist at all costs on the Kuchkov Kamen (Hill 1800 north of the Kozjak). On the 17th the attacks of the II Serbian Army on that position and further east on the Topolatz, on the Studena Voda (Hill 1201), developed. The enemy resistance was desperate, and their counter-attacks were sometimes successful, but the Serbian advance continued irresistibly, and the enemy abandoned one position after another, losing a great deal of material. General Russoff, Commander of the 2nd Bulgarian Division, was relieved by order of the German Command, and succeeded by General Nikoloff, but neither this change of Command nor the sending of some feeble reinforcements could hold up the

advance. On the same day the I Serbian Army attacked the Mount Beshista-Pandeli-Trezia line; on the 18th the Danube Division captured the important bridge of Razim Bey on the Cerna, and the entire army commenced a vast turning movement to occupy the whole of the right bank of the river from Selo-Monastir to Polosko. The Bulgarians defended themselves obstinately, hoping to save their vast depots filled with supplies, but being unable to succeed in this object, they were forced to fall back, burning the bridges between Polosko and Cebren, and everything they could not remove. On the 18th-19th the Danube Division created a bridge-head at Razin Bey on the Cerna, which it afterwards consolidated so as to co-operate with the French and Greeks on the left bank. It was, however, necessary to complete the operation by reaching the middle Vardar, as a frontal advance by Ghevgheli offered serious difficulties. The Serbian Cavalry Division, commanded by Colonel Georgevich, which had been brought to the immediate rear of the Serbian main lines, was now pushed forward to Kavadar, the important road centre a little to the south of the confluence of the Vardar and the Cerna. This was the extreme point reached by the Armée d'Orient in the autumn of 1915. But the advance of the Serbians had been very rapid, whereas the forces on their flanks were still on their old positions, so that an apparently dangerous salient had been created. At the same time the C.A.A. had received information from reliable sources that some German reinforcements had arrived on the Struma front; in fact, a Greek patrol had captured some prisoners of the 256th Reserve Regiment, a unit now identified for the first time in Macedonia, and which was believed to be in Roumania. This and other information concerning German movements led to the belief that an attack was being threatened against the right flank of the Armée d'Orient, which was held only by Greek troops without heavy artillery, and therefore regarded as the weakest sector. For a moment the Staff of the C.A.A. contemplated the possibility of suspending the offensive, and

even of recalling the more advanced troops, but after short reflection, and in consequence of the earnest insistence of the Serbian Command, General Franchet d'Espérey decided to stick to his original plan. The advance thus continued; the Morava Division occupied Mount Chaterna, and crossed the Belasnitza torrent, the Yugoslav Division occupied Mount Rozden and advanced on the village of Mrzetzko; the Timok Division, after a lively engagement, captured the Studena Voda and the Blatetz; the I Group of Divisions, having overcome the enemy's resistance at Zborsko, captured all the positions in that area and occupied Nonte and Mount Preslap. On the 19th, the line attained was the following: North of Nonte, north of Mount Blatetz, north of Rozden, Mrzetzko, course of the Belsnitza (which had been crossed at various points), Vrbetzko, course of the Cerna, passing by Vprchani, the bridge head of Razim Bey, then in a south-westerly direction towards the front of the 11th Colonial Division on the left of the Cerna. But the Serbian Cavalry Division had pushed ahead a great deal further towards Kavadar with such rapidity that the C.A.A. could no longer follow its operations. On the 20th the Danube Division was deployed along the left bank of the Cerna from Razim Bey to Godiak, the Morava Division from Godiak to Polosko, the Yugoslav Division on the Drachevatzko Brdo and on the heights north of Brusani, the Timok Division to the north-west of Radina and at the village of Bohila, while its divisional cavalry (not to be confused with the Cavalry Division) was descending into the valley of Boshava. News was received that the Cavalry Division was already in Kavadar, and had reached Marena and Sopot; soon afterwards it reached the Vardar at Negotin, and cut the Uskub-Ghevgheli railway. The I Group continued to advance, and on the 21st detachments of the 16th Colonial, the Greek Archipelago and 4th Divisions captured Mounts Dzena and Yarena, the chief points of the Eastern Moglena; there only remained Mount Porta, obstinately held by a Bulgarian detachment. But even this position fell soon after. The I Group now descended from a height of 2,000 m.



to 100 m., reaching the Vardar and Demir Kapu. The same day the river was reached by troops of the II Serbian Army between Demir Kapu and Krivolak. The 122nd Division and all the heavy artillery was now being transferred towards the Cerna loop, with a view to new operations in that area. The speed of the advance had shown the diminishing combative spirit of the Bulgarians, who, in spite of the fact that the famous second and third lines did not exist, might have resisted on the many extremely strong natural positions. The number of prisoners captured was not very large, about 6,000, and the guns a little more than 100. It therefore seemed as though the Bulgarians were anxious to save their artillery and keep their army in being in order to defend themselves on positions further north, perhaps on the frontiers of Bulgaria.

In the morning the attack was commenced on the right flank with the object of preventing the enemy from sending reinforcements against the Serbs, and from threatening the salient that the advance of the latter had created. West and north of Lake Doiran the enemy had concentrated some of the best Bulgarian regiments, with three in reserve and two to the north-east of the lake. As we have seen, the British XII Corps was spread out to the west of the lake, comprising the British 22nd and 26th Divisions (Generals Duncan and Gay), the Greek Serres Division (in all 27 battalions), and the French 2nd bis Zouave Regiment, with a great deal of artillery, including nearly all the medium and heavy calibre guns not employed on the Serbian front. To the north-east there was the XVI Corps, comprising the 28th British Division (General Croker) and the Greek Cretan Division. After a very intense bombardment, lasting several days, the attack was launched at 5.15 hours on both sectors. The objectives of General Wilson's attack were the same as those of the attacks in the spring of 1917, and the enemy positions were of immense strength. The hard rocky ground, as General Milne wrote in his dispatch of December 1, 1918, makes the consolidation of newly won positions very difficult, and gives over-

whelming advantage to the defender in trenches that have been the work of three years, while deep cut ravines hold up progress and afford every opportunity for enfilading fire.

Soon after six o'clock, the Greeks on the right had stormed the enemy positions up to Doiran Hill, and had taken many prisoners, while on the left the 66th Brigade advanced on P ridge "with consummate self-sacrifice and gallantry." The enemy had here three strong lines of defence, teeming with concrete machine-gun emplacements, whence they could mow down the advancing columns. After very severe fighting the 12th Battalion, Cheshire Regiment, and the 9th South Lancashire, supported by the 8th King's Shropshire Light Infantry, reached the third line. But the devastating machine-gun fire and the explosion of a mine, which held them up for a little, made it impossible for the attacking force to hold their positions and obliged them to fall back on their lines of departure. The brigade lost 65 per cent. of its effectives, including two battalion commanders, Lieutenant-Colonel Clegg Hill and Lieutenant-Colonel Bishop, who fell at the head of their troops. In the centre British and Greek forces attacked the positions between the Grand Couronné and the P ridge, and, in spite of the enemy's desperate resistance and machine-gun fire, penetrated about one mile, and reached the lower slopes of the Grand Couronné. But the failure of the attack on the P ridge made it impossible for them to retain their ground, and they were forced to fall back, "the last to leave being the survivors of the 7th Battalion, South Wales Borderers—19 unwounded men and one wounded officer."

To the north-east of the lake the Cretan Division and troops of the 28th Division had advanced across the plain between the lake and the Beles range, and at dawn attacked the enemy positions; the outpost lines were carried, and the main lines penetrated at two points, but the ground gained could not be maintained, and General Milne authorized the force to fall back on the railway.

In order to assist the progress of the Serbs and to prevent the enemy on the Doiran front from sending

reserves against them, it was decided to renew the attack the next day. General Wilson's force had been strengthened by the 14th Greek Division sent up from the training camp at Naresh to relieve the Serres Division, which had suffered heavily.

On the 19th, at five o'clock, after an all-night bombardment, Scottish and Greek troops again attacked the Bulgarian positions on the lower slopes of the Grand Couronné, and captured a good deal of ground, in spite of the desperate resistance and heavy machine-gun fire of the enemy. But the 65th Brigade, which had come up from an influenza observation camp in the night to relieve the 66th, failed in its gallant attack on the P ridge. The troops at the centre and on the right thus found their left exposed, and were forced to fall back, and part of the ground gained on the previous day had also to be abandoned. The retreat was covered by the 12th Battalion, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, the 8th Royal Scots Fusiliers, and the 11th Scottish Rifles, who suffered severe casualties, including all their Commanding Officers killed or wounded. By midday General Milne decided to consolidate the ground won, which included the Petit Couronné, the Téton Hill, and Doiran town; but the P ridge and the Grand Couronné still held out.

The total losses of the British had been about 3,900, and of the Greeks 2,300. The Bulgarians, too, had lost heavily—some 4,600 men, including 1,200 prisoners. It was impossible to renew the attack owing to the greatly reduced strength of the British, whose battalions, even before the attack, were only about 400 men each, and now the slopes of the Grand Couronné and the P ridges were covered with British dead. Although the Bulgarians had been almost without food for four days as the British barrage had prevented the arrival of supplies, they still occupied their terrible positions, and the whole thing seemed a useless tragedy in spite of the great heroism shown. "Rather than miss the opportunity for which they had waited three years, officers and men remained in the ranks till often they dropped from sheer

exhaustion," wrote General Milne in his report—but nothing had been gained. The real objective, however, had been achieved: not a single Bulgarian soldier had been able to leave this sector to help in resisting the Serbian advance.

It was at this moment that the defeat of the enemy began to take shape. A great part of the Vardar-Cerna triangle was lost, the few troops remaining between Demir Kapu and Ghevgheli had now to fall back beyond the Vardar in a north-easterly direction, and this fact constituted a menace even for the troops round Lake Doiran, to whom no other line of supply was left but the Doiran-Kosturino-Strumitza road. On the 21st signs that a retreat was beginning were noted on the British front. Everywhere depots were observed to be in flames, and munitions dumps exploding. General Milne, with his XII Corps strengthened by the 14th Greek Division, renewed the offensive. The 9th Bulgarian Division having offered but slight resistance, the formidable defences collapsed without much effort, and the whole II Bulgarian Army fell back, seeking safety over the narrow Kosturino Pass. While the British infantry and cavalry pursued them, flights of aeroplanes, flying only a few metres from the ground, bombarded the Bulgarians and shot down men with machine guns along the Strumitza road, encumbered with vehicles, artillery, etc., by now in indescribable disorder. The spectacle offered by that road was one of appalling confusion and terror. From all sides fires broke out; guns were abandoned in gullies, rifles, equipment, baggage were thrown away, and the demoralized army fled towards its homeland.

On the 21st the A.F.O. came into action. The enemy troops on this sector were less threatened than on the other sectors, because, if they had lost the Prilep-Gradsko road, they still retained that over the Babuna Pass between Prilep and Veles, which could be easily defended, and the Kichevo-Kalkandelen road. But they were now threatened in another quarter. Day by day the communications between the XI German Army and Bulgaria were



becoming more difficult, and it could be foreseen that at any moment they might be cut altogether, and then that Army would have had no other alternative but to retreat across Albania to reach the Herzegovina and Dalmatia. It was the fate of the Serbian Army in 1915 which seemed about to be repeated. On that day detachments of the 11th Colonial Division (General Farret) and the 3rd Greek Division (General Tricoupis) crossed the Cerna (east) between Selo-Monastir and Cebren, and advanced in the direction of Prilep. General Henrys, commanding the A.F.O., now ordered the advance of his whole army, beginning with an attack launched by the Italian Expeditionary Force.

The duties assigned to the latter were: 1st, to carry out, during the Franco-Serbian offensive, an intensive demonstrative action, to prevent the enemy in front of it from withdrawing troops to reinforce the centre (a duty similar to that of the British); 2nd, the Franco-Serbian attack having been launched, the I.E.F. was to continue to act demonstratively and to resist any counter-attack which might be attempted by the enemy, in fact, to provoke such counter-attacks so as to make the enemy believe that we ourselves intended to attack immediately, and to make of our sector the pivot of an enveloping movement on the part of the Serbs; 3rd, as soon as this movement had produced its effect on the right flank of the 302nd German Division (the one opposite to us) and on the lines of communication in the Cerna loop, to attack and pursue the enemy in the direction of Prilep, their chief centre of supplies west of the Vardar and headquarters of the XI German Army.

The first and second of these tasks were carried out in the period from the 14th to the 21st of September, and the Italian troops nailed down the enemy on its front by means of bombardments and repeated local attacks of so fierce a character as not only to prevent them from sending any help against the Franco-Serbs, but to make them believe that the attack in the centre was to be followed immediately by one on our area. In order to forestall this supposed intention, they attacked vigorously,

so much so, that the object desired by the Commander-in-Chief was more than achieved, but at the cost of heavy losses on our side. Our defences were seriously wrecked by the German and Bulgarian artillery, but the Italian infantry resisted admirably under this terrific fire, and the enemy attacks were all repulsed. On September 22nd the threat of an enveloping movement in the direction of the Cerna (east) began to be perceived by the enemy, and General Mombelli ordered the attack. At 17.30 hours our infantry sprang out of the trenches, where they had been held down for two years, unable to advance a step; an hour later they were beyond the enemy's first lines, and the whole mighty defensive system collapsed. The terrible Hill 1050, which had been so powerfully fortified, which we had studied with such minute care and attention as though it were a zone of great archæological interest, and whose crest we had never been able to hold, was finally in our hands. Those cruel eyes of the enemy's observation posts on the topmost ridge, whose pitiless glance had inflicted death or wounds to so many gallant soldiers, were now closed for ever.

The defences proved even stronger than we had suspected. Immense caverns there were, cut out of the solid rock on the northern slopes of the hill, which our shells had never been able to reach, illuminated by electricity and supplied with special appliances, by means of which the various detachments were warned of every different kind of bombardment, so that each man knew at once where to take refuge—nothing, in fact, had been neglected to make of this mountain an impregnable fortress.

In this first attack we took few prisoners, about 150, because the broken nature of the ground enabled the bulk of the enemy forces to escape us, as had happened to the Franco-Serbians for the same reasons on the first days. The Lucca Light Cavalry and the detachments of machine gunners on motor lorries, which General Mombelli had kept ready near the front, dashed forward in pursuit of the enemy and had some heavy engagements at Kanatlarci. The whole division then advanced. On the morning of the 22nd the battalions were 10 km.

beyond the enemy lines, and were pursuing the Bulgarian rearguard. The Command also pushed forward its G.H.Q., and Tepavci was abandoned for good. In the Monastir-Prilep plain, behind Hill 1050, there were several heights on which the enemy might have made a stand, but as on the Serbian front, there were no second lines, except a few lines of insignificant wire entanglements and some isolated trenches. The Bulgarians offered a certain resistance on the heights of Cepik (Hill 664), Kalabak (Hill 1772), and Topolchani (Hill 603), on both sides of the Monastir-Prilep road, while our troops occupied the edge of these same heights. From that point the advance on Prilep would have been easy, but at 14 hours on the 23rd our Command received orders from the G.Q.G. to let Prilep be occupied by the 11th Colonial Division on our right, and to advance on Krushevo. The reason for this change of programme was to prevent the enemy troops in the Monastir area from retreating towards Kichevo, whence a road leads across the mountains to Gostivar and Kalkandelen, the terminus of the railway from Uskub. This task was really important, because its object was to prevent numerous Bulgarian regiments from reaching Uskub and to facilitate the action of the Franco-Serb offensive towards that very important railway and road junction, the only point through which the remains of the XI German Army could hope to rejoin the rest of the enemy troops. But it cannot be denied that this change of programme was a disappointment for our officers and men. Prilep was a well-known objective, and had been much talked about as it was the headquarters of the Army Command, and was provided with depots and shelters; it had to be occupied by someone, and its occupation by our troops would have been a slight moral and material satisfaction for the 35th Division such as it was not accustomed to. The matter was really of small importance, but it would have pleased us had it been known that that important centre had been first occupied by the Italians. The fact that French troops were sent there instead of ours was not, perhaps, due to any lack of consideration towards us on the part







of the C.A.A., but it appeared in that light, all the more so as the same thing had happened when we were acting in liaison with the French in the Monastir operations, and it would have been better to avoid even the appearance of unfriendliness.

But the Division at once set to work to execute this new plan, and after effecting a conversion of 90 degrees in a westerly direction, it set forth on an exhausting march, after the long and arduous fighting advance of the previous days. The troops, however, gave no signs of fatigue, and reached the line between Cepik and the bridge over the Belavitza. On the 24th our right wing (Sicilia Brigade with 6 mountain batteries), which was advancing towards Zapolchani, was temporarily held up by the enemy artillery, firing from the heights of Novo Selani, while the centre and the left (Cagliari Brigade with 2 mountain batteries, 9 French field batteries, 1 heavy French battery, and 2 squadrons of the Lucca cavalry) reached the Vodiani-Krivogastani line, and found itself confronted by the enemy infantry in strong positions on the edge of the heights of Krushevo (Hill 1176), and of the Draghisetz (Hills 1150 and 1291), and in the gorge of the Cerna, near the Buchin bridge and Vodiani. The Ivrea Brigade, which was in reserve, followed towards the left.

On the 25th the Sicilia Brigade, strengthened by detachments of the 11th French Colonial Division, which had just come up, reached the heights of Godivla, north-east of Krushevo; the centre halted on the edge of the heights of Krushevo, rising precipitously 550 m. above the plain, while the left began the attack on Buchin, where it became engaged in a vigorous combat. On the 26th the whole Division, having overcome the enemy resistance, crossed the great barrier of the Baba Planina and Draghisetz mountains, its right pushed forward to the foot of Mount Cesma, the centre at Krushevo and Ostreltze, and its left along the line Sveta-Hill 1150-Hill 1291 of the Draghisetz. Thus the Bulgarians, in retiring from the Monastir area, could no longer fall back on Prilep, but were forced to try to reach the Kichevo-

Kalkandelen gorge, which was becoming more crowded every hour. The same evening we pushed a strong column westward from Krushevo in the direction of Karaul Kruska and Sop, while another, which had also started from Krushevo, advanced through Ostreltze towards Tzer.

On the 27th, our positions were as follows. The right wing occupied the greater part of Mount Cesma, and, together with the French troops, drove back the enemy from the Harilovo-Diviak area. The main column of the centre, having advanced beyond Pustareka, had reached Karaul Kruska, and the flanking column on the left, which, after having passed through Kochista, reached the neighbourhood of Tzer; the left, after occupying Priblitz, pushed forward through Dolentzi to Sop, along the Monastir-Kichevo road. On the 28th, the right column completed the occupation of Mount Cesma, and advanced towards the Stramol and Baba mountains, north-east of Sop; the principal column and the centre, after overcoming the enemy's vigorous resistance, occupied a line of heights 3 km. to the east of that village, while its left flanking column co-operated in the action from Tzer. The left reached Hill 932 to the south of Sop, in support of the action of the centre.

The Bulgarians here were in very strong positions. With numerous forces of infantry, a great many machine guns, and several field and heavy batteries withdrawn from the Monastir front, they had entrenched themselves on formidable lines in the Sop gorge, where they were prepared to offer a desperate resistance. The following day the Sicilia Brigade succeeded in driving the enemy from Mounts Stramol and Baba, and after occupying these positions pushed on towards Plasnitza to co-operate with the 11th Colonial Division, which was attacking the enemy entrenched on the heights of Izitza to the north of the Yelika valley. In the centre our battalions renewed the attack on Sop from the south-east and east so as to pin down the enemy, while those of the right column executed a turning movement from Karaul Kruska towards the north-east to cut off their retreat. The

fighting during those days was very fierce, and cost us 500 casualties. The Bulgars had been strengthened on the night of the 28th-29th by two more regiments and several machine-gun companies, which had fallen back from Monastir, but had been recalled. The behaviour of our troops in all these very stiff engagements against an enemy superior in numbers, in dominating positions, and supplied with great abundance of artillery of all calibres and machine-guns, had been admirable, and it must be remembered that they were exhausted by the long and tiring marches over very rough country. If the Serbs had advanced further, they had, however, after the first two days found an enemy that resisted far less vigorously than was the case in our sector. Furthermore, the enemy opposed to us was directly under German Command—Army Command, Corps Command, and partly Divisional Command—and was stiffened by the presence of several German detachments.

The French divisions of the A.F.O. (30th, 57th, 76th, 156th) came into action almost at the same moment as the Italians. General Henrys wished to cut off the enemy's retreat by the Kichevo-Kalkandelen road, the only one which still remained open, but in the sector of Hill 1248 the Bulgarians still resisted tenaciously and held up the advance. To the west, the 302nd German Division had begun to fall back, the 6th and 1st Bulgarian Divisions were forced to follow suit, and this enabled the French to deploy along the Dihovo-Dragarina line to the north-west of Monastir, finally liberating that unfortunate city from a bombardment that had lasted nearly two years. On the 23rd the French occupied Berantzi and Topolchani, and on the evening of that day, while the Italians were advancing towards Krushevo to the north-west, they reached the line Kukurechani-Novo Selani-Prilep, cutting across the line of our advance, and the French cavalry entered Prilep, followed on the 24th by the 11th Colonial Division. On the 25th the Bulgars still held out to the west of Monastir, and with the help of three regiments, which had retired but had been subsequently recalled, repulsed the attacks of the 76th Division; the 156th was at



Stari Srptzi, and beyond the sector occupied by the 35th, the 3rd Greek Division (attached to the 11th Colonial) was deployed across the Prilep-Brod road.<sup>1</sup> It was then suspected by the C.A.A. that a new defensive plan had been evolved by the enemy—and its existence has been subsequently confirmed by Marshal von Hindenburg's *Memoirs*—to withdraw the centre and right, making a pivot of the Doiran sector, and resisting at Uskub, until the arrival of the Bulgarians retreating from the Monastir area, *via* Kichevo-Kalkandelen, and of the reinforcements expected from Germany and Austria. The Bulgarians, as we have seen, tried to delay the advance of the French and Italians, calling back regiments that had begun to retire but this decision proved fatal. The troops that had withdrawn on the 25th found their line of retreat cut to the north by Allied detachments. On the same day the 30th Division reached Prevaletz (Hill 912), on the road from Monastir to Resna, and on the 26th it reached the latter place; the 76th crossed the Semnitza river, and the 156th occupied Hill 1493 on the Drvenik, to the south of Vodiani. In the meanwhile General Franchet d'Espérey had created a new unit, called the Groupement Tranié, composed of the 42nd and 44th Regiments of the 11th Colonial Division, the 58th Battalion of Chasseurs à pied, the Cavalry Brigade, a group of 75 mm. batteries and one of 65 mm., with orders to push on towards Uskub. Later the 76th Division rapidly left the Babuna road from Prilep towards Veles and Uskub, and along the heights to the north-west of it. On the 26th the line held by the A.F.O. (the 35th Division included) was the following: Resna-Sveti Petar-Murgas-west of Krushevo-Belushin-Yakrenovo-Ropotovo (on the Prilep-Kichevo road). On the 28th, with the occupation of Ochrida by the 57th, the line passed by Hill 975, Demir Hissar (on the Monastir-Kichevo road), and Brod on the Prilep-Kichevo road. The French reached Trebuniste, to the north of Ochrida on the 29th, and advancing along the west shore of the lake, cut the

<sup>1</sup> Brod to the north of Monastir, not to be confused with the other Brod in the Cerna loop.

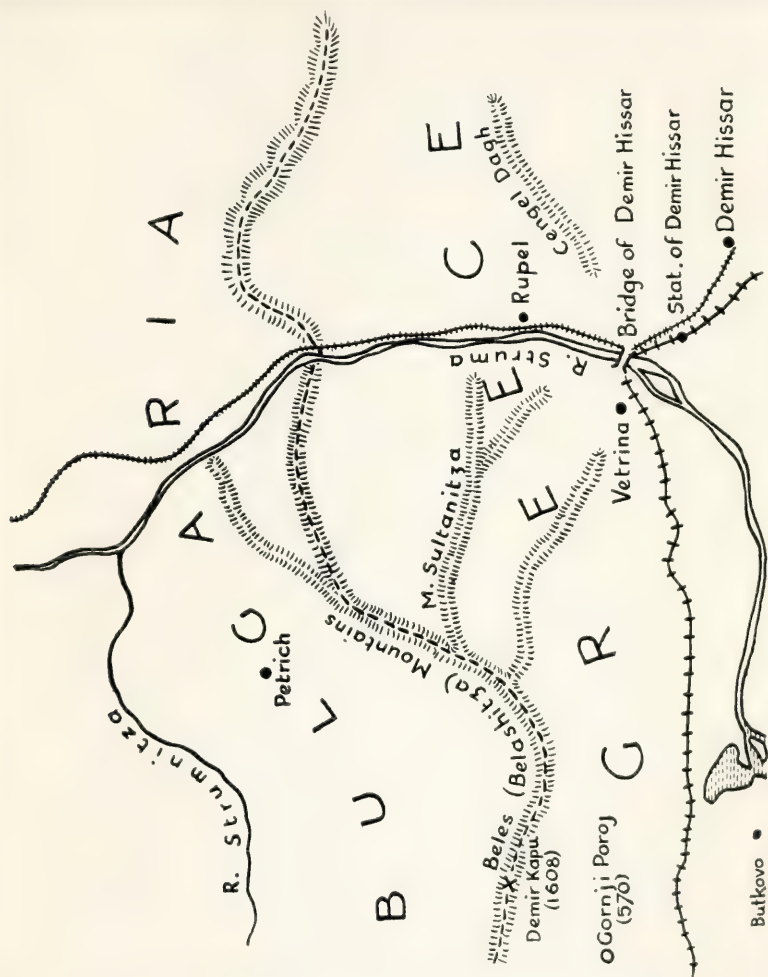
Elbasan-Ochrida road at Lin, and thus the last line of escape across Albania which remained to the XI German Army was closed.

The I Serbian Army pushed on down Cerna valley to the west of the river, and advanced in a north-westerly direction, reaching the Leniste-Pletvar-Troyatzi-Toplitza-Drenovo (to the north-west of the Prilep-Gradsko road) line. Along this road the Serbs captured a great deal of booty and many vehicles. The Bulgarians, urged by the German Command, made every effort to defend Gradsko, a vital centre of their communications, full of large military depots, against the Franco-Serbs (Yugoslav Division and 17th Colonial Division), but on the 23rd, after the 11th Colonial Division had captured the monastery and the village of Chichevo, Gradsko fell into the hands of the Serbs. Once Gradsko was lost, the enemy tried to defend Veles, but the Tranié Group was, as we have seen, on the Babuna road, and on the same day the Serbian Army reached the same road beyond Izvor. On the 25th the Serbian cavalry entered Istip, and on the 26th the II Army, after a fairly brisk engagement, occupied Veles, and pushed on towards the north-west. Immediately afterwards the Serbian cavalry reached Kochana, Grlena and Tzarevo Selo, this latter an important point whence the upper valley of the Struma, which is in Bulgaria, could be menaced. The cavalry was followed by the infantry, conveyed in British and French lorries, and entered Kochana. On the 29th the French cavalry, commanded by General Jouinot-Gambetta, to which a part of the Serbian Cavalry was attached, after a forced march, entered Uskub, the chief city of Northern Macedonia, and erstwhile German G.H.Q. in the Balkans, a junction of four railways and of numerous roads. Thus the enemy's hope of resisting, by effecting a junction between the detachments of the XI German Army, arriving from Kalkandelen (which, according to Von Hindenburg, was in excellent condition), and the Austrian and German reinforcements from the north, was rendered vain. Soon afterwards the remainder of the Tranié Group arrived, while the Serbian Yugoslav and Timok Divisions pushed

eastwards towards the Bulgarian frontier. The Bulgarians still held out on the Tzrni Kamen and in the Tzarevo Selo, Bogdanovatz, and Chavka area, and protected the retreat of the remnants of the I Army towards Djumaya. The Yugoslav Division and the cavalry occupied Tzar Vrh (Hill 2104), Tzrkvenetz, and Ostretz, and spread out to Tzarevo Selo, thus dominating the approaches to Kustendil. Contemporaneously with these operations, the I Group of Divisions (from which the 27th British Division had been detached to rejoin the rest of the British Army) had cleaned up the whole of the area to the north-west of Ghevgheli and to the north-east of the Vardar on the Gradetz mountains. On the 29th it occupied Radovista, and effected a junction with the Serbs.

The British now continued their pursuit of the enemy in their desperate retreat towards Strumitza, and soon occupied the whole of the area to the west and north of Lake Doiran. On the 25th the troops of the XVI Corps advanced to the right and left of the Doiran-Strumitza road, and penetrated into Bulgaria by the Kosturino pass; on the 26th they occupied Strumitza itself.<sup>1</sup> These were the first Allied detachments to penetrate into enemy territory in the Balkans; actually the first to enter were the Derbyshire Yeomanry. The XII Corps had, in the meanwhile, pushed towards the right of the XVth, and on the 25th commenced the attack on the Beles to the east and the right. On the same day General Milne transferred his G.H.Q. from Salonica to Janesh in order to be nearer the scene of operations. On the 26th, detachments of the British 22nd and 20th Divisions and the Cretan Division, and of the 2nd bis Zouaves regiment attacked the Bulgarians entrenched on the Beles, that vast mountain wall from 1,100 m. to 1,600 m. high, which for two years has seemed an absolutely impregnable barrier. The enemy offered but slight resistance, because they were already beaten, and the heights were occupied

<sup>1</sup> It must be remembered that Strumitza station is in Serbian territory, whereas the town was then in Bulgaria. Now the town too has been assigned to Serbia.



GRECO-BULGARIAN FRONTIER.





one after the other. On the 28th a regiment of the Cretan Division pushed along the ridge from west to east, another, together with the British 228th Brigade, advanced along the valley below towards Lake Butkova, and a third column of the XVI Corps followed the parallel valley to the north, down the course of the River Strumitza. The object of this triple advance was to reach the Struma towards the Rupel and Kresna gorges, and thus cut off the retreat of the forces of the II Army, which had remained until then on the lower Struma.

Thus the enemy armies were cut in two. The rapid advance of the French and Serbs had driven a deep wedge in between the XI German Army and the rest of the hostile forces. The XI Army was partly on the mountains to the north of the Monastir-Prilep plain, and partly in the Kalkandelen area; the 2nd, 4th, 5th, 9th, and 13th Divisions of the I Bulgarian Army were echeloned between the Uskub-Kumanovo road and the valley of the Strumitza, but they had lost a large part of their artillery; the II Army was still on the lower Struma, and its retreat towards Bulgaria was seriously threatened by the Anglo-Greek advance. Bulgaria was invaded by the British in the Strumitza Valley, the Serbians were watching on the Bulgarian-Macedonian frontier between Tzarevo Selo and Pehtzevo, ready to descend on the territory of the hated enemy and take vengeance for their past sufferings. The I Greek Corps, which until then had remained inactive, was now ready to cross the valley of the Struma and launch an attack on Serres and Demir Hissar.

General Mombelli was making his preparations for a general attack on Sop, where large Bulgarian forces were concentrated. The attack was to take place on the morning of the 30th in order to compel the enemy to surrender. The German Commands of the XI Army, of the LXI and LXII Corps, and of the 302nd Division, as well as the artillery, machine-gun companies and German specialist detachments, realizing that the Bulgarian defeat was now inevitable, fled in the night, after having cut all the telegraph and telephone wires, so that for several

days the Bulgarian Army had no communication with the rest of the army or with their country. It had to improvise new Commands and Staffs for its units, which had been abandoned by their erstwhile omnipotent Allies. The attack on Sop was to have been launched from the north and north-east by the Sicilia Brigade, and contemporaneously from the south and south-west by the Ivrea and Cagliari Brigades, but at 5.30 General Mombelli received a wireless message announcing the conclusion of the Armistice, which was to come into force on that very day. The attack was therefore suspended, and the Bulgarian Commander invited to surrender. But as the communications with their G.H.Q. and with the Sofia Government had been cut, he refused at first to believe the news, and it took two days of discussion, conducted on the Italian side by General Freri, Commander of the Cagliari Brigade, to convince the Bulgarians, and it was only on October 3rd that the surrender took place. The capitulation was unconditional, the officers alone being allowed to retain their swords and revolvers. The prisoners comprised a Divisional Commander, two Brigadiers, 16 field officers, 224 junior officers, and 7,727 men; 8 guns and 70 machine guns, and a large quantity of other booty were captured. At the same time, the rest of the troops who had been fighting against us on the Stramol and Baba mountains—over 10,000 men and many batteries—surrendered to the 11th French Colonial Division near Kichevo, because it was easier of access. It was thus against a total of nearly 18,000 men with a large number of batteries and machine guns that the troops of the 35th Division, inferior in numbers and material, had fought for three days and won. Except for the fighting of the British at Lake Doiran, it had been the bitterest struggle of the great battle of the Balkans.

For several days the Bulgarians had realized that they had lost the war. After the fall of Gradsko, which Marshal von Hindenburg attributes to "pusillanimity or worse," there was no longer any hope, because the vital centre of communications had been cut. The great bulk of the Bulgarian soldiers had had enough of fighting,

and desertions *en masse* from the divisions at the centre towards the interior began. The German Command, not having succeeded, in spite of the reserves which had been drawn from the right and the left, in saving Gradsko, decided to retreat. As Marshal von Hindenburg rightly observes, the great natural defensive positions in the Balkan peninsula extend one behind the other, so that an army which retires in good order has always fresh lines on which to fall back; the Bulgarian generals, however, were of the opinion that the army could hold out only on condition that it remained where it was, but that it would go to pieces if the order for a general retreat were given. In fact, as soon as the withdrawal of the troops on the Doiran sector began, it soon degenerated into a rout. According to the German Field Marshal, all the Staffs failed in their duty, especially those of the I Bulgarian Army. The only man who did not lose his head was the German Commander-in-Chief, General von Scholtz. The Bulgarian Government made desperate appeals for help to Germany and Austria, but to these "S.O.S." signals the Central Powers were no longer in a position to reply adequately. The armies of Germany had been seriously beaten in France, and were falling back, fighting a desperate and hopeless battle; the Austrians were pinned down on the Piave and in the Seven Communes in front of the Italian Army, which was preparing to launch the final attack. A few divisions collected here and there were hurried forward; the Alpen Corps from France, two infantry divisions from the Crimea, and some other units. Then there was in Roumania a fairly large army, although not in a fit condition to go into the first line. A mixed brigade destined for the Caucasus, and already half-way across the Black Sea, was recalled by wireless, landed at Varna and Constanza, and hurried off to Macedonia. The German troops who arrived in Sofia found everything quiet, but parties of Bulgarian soldiers were constantly pouring in, having abandoned the front lines. They did not molest their officers, nor oblige them to desert if they wished to remain; they were even ready to help the Germans



who were going towards the front ; but they were fed up and wished to return to their fields and their families. They had ceased to take any further interest in Macedonia. Even an Army Commander telegraphed to the Tzar insisting that an armistice should be asked for, but received the reply : " Go and get killed in your present lines." The assurances given by the Imperial Chancellor to the Reichstag that help for Bulgaria had been provided for, and that powerful reinforcements were being hurried up, no longer deceived anybody.

On September 26th a Bulgarian officer with a white flag appeared before the British lines ; General Milne sent him to General Franchet d'Espérey, who, however, replied that he could only deal with *parlementaires* provided with proper credentials. The Bulgarian Government, in the meanwhile, was trying, through Mr. Murphy, the American Chargé d'Affaires in Sofia, to obtain the intervention of that Government, which was not in a state of war with Bulgaria. Mr. Murphy, in fact, had tried to intervene, and asked permission to accompany the plenipotentiaries which the Sofia Government decided to send to Salonica, but the C.A.A. did not see fit to adhere to this request. The useful part played by Mr. Murphy with his propaganda in Bulgaria in favour of a separate peace with the Entente should not be forgotten, but it appears that he tried, without success, to obtain favourable armistice conditions for the Bulgarians. In the meanwhile General Franchet d'Espérey had telegraphed to Paris, asking for authority to negotiate an armistice. The authorization arrived on the 27th, together with instructions as to the terms of the agreement to be negotiated. On the 28th, the official Bulgarian delegation reached the British front. It was composed of M. Liapcheff, Finance Minister, General Lukoff, Commander of the II Army, and the diplomat, M. Radeff, with two A.D.C.'s. Soon afterwards a huge German Staff car, adorned with the Royal arms of Bulgaria, flashed down the Janesh road and reached Salonica, conveying the first enemy plenipotentiaries coming to sue for peace with the Entente. After a first meeting with General Franchet d'Espérey,



CRASHED ITALIAN AEROPLANE.



COMMUNICATION TRENCHES IN THE MEGLENTZI VALLEY.



the delegates withdrew to their lodgings, and the official meetings began on the morning of the 29th, at the house of the Commander-in-Chief. The negotiations were short and business-like, but the Bulgarians tried to turn to account the fact that their country had never been very enthusiastic about the war, and had no particular sympathy for the Germans, nor animosity against the Allies. M. Liapcheff even went so far as to suggest that Bulgaria had now become a neutral State, and might almost be considered an ally. But General Franchet d'Espérey curtly replied: "You are defeated, and you must submit to the Allies' terms. Bulgaria is not a neutral country, but a military zone, and it is inadmissible that we should not pass through it."<sup>1</sup>

The Bulgarian delegates, duly authorized by their Government, accepted all the conditions imposed on them by the Armistice. They only raised some difficulties over the occupation of Bulgarian territory by the Serbs and Greeks (one of the secret clauses of the Armistice gave the Allies the right to occupy certain areas in the interior of Bulgaria), but General Franchet d'Espérey waived aside these objections, saying that the Entente was a group of peoples, great and small, but all free, whereas in the enemy Alliance Germany was the mistress and the others were her vassals. Therefore the Greeks and Serbs should be able to take part in the occupation of Bulgaria like the other Allies. However, the Prince Regent of Serbia, having heard that some of his Generals were insisting on being allowed to occupy Bulgarian territory, in order to satisfy their national pride and avenge the persecutions inflicted on Serbia by the Bulgarians, telegraphed to the Commander-in-Chief that he preferred to waive this right in order not to embitter relations between Serbia and Bulgaria still more; he wished, on the contrary, to contribute to the pacification of the Balkans. M. Venizelos made a similar pronouncement. The decision was certainly a wise one; reprisals and acts of revenge were thus avoided, for the Serbs and Greeks, if they had been in occupation of the land of

<sup>1</sup> Photiades, *op. cit.*



the hated enemy, would not have been able to restrain themselves.

The Armistice provided :—

- (1) The immediate evacuation of the territories still occupied by the Bulgarians in Serbian and Greek Macedonia ;
- (2) The immediate demobilization of the whole Bulgarian Army, except 3 infantry divisions and 4 cavalry regiments for the defence of the Turkish frontier and the Dobrugia, and for guarding the railways ;
- (3) The arms and other material of the demobilized units to be stored in places to be subsequently determined, under Allied control ;
- (4) All material of the IV Greek Army Corps (which had surrendered to Germany), and was still in Bulgaria, to be handed over to Greece ;
- (5) The Bulgarian troops to the west of the meridian of Uskub were to surrender as prisoners of war ;
- (6) The Allies had the right to use all Bulgarian prisoners of war until peace was signed, but Bulgaria must hand over to the Allied authorities all Allied prisoners and deported civilians without reciprocity ;
- (7) The troops and diplomatic and consular representatives of Germany and Austria must leave Bulgaria within four weeks.<sup>1</sup>

The secret clauses authorized the Allies to make use of the railways, roads, and other means of communication and transport in Bulgaria for the movement of their troops and to occupy certain strategic points. Sofia was not to be occupied save in exceptional circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See complete text in Appendix.

<sup>2</sup> The capital was, however, actually occupied.

At 22.30 hours on September 29th the Armistice was concluded. It was signed by General Franchet d'Espérey for the Allies and by the Finance Minister, Liapcheff, and General Lukoff for Bulgaria; it came into force on September 30th at noon.

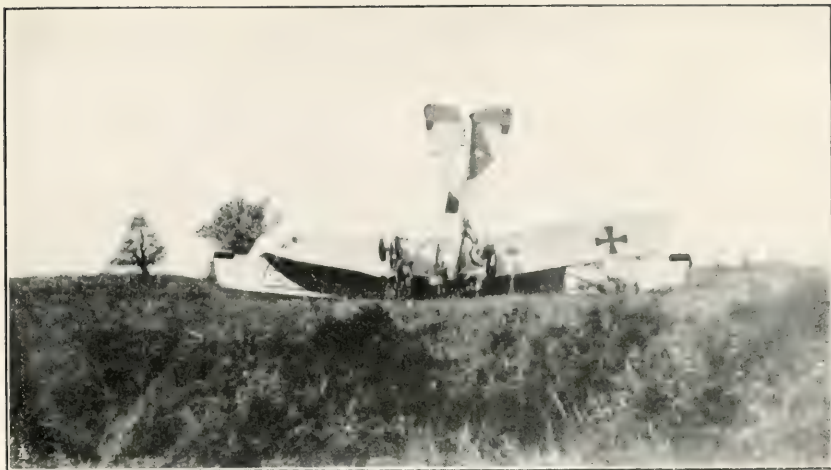
On September 30th the number of prisoners captured by the Allies was not very great, about 15,000 to 20,000 (those opposite the 35th Division did not surrender, as we know, until a few days later). But the Bulgarians had lost about one-third of their artillery; 350 guns had been captured, and many others, which had been abandoned or hidden in the woods and gullies, were found subsequently, and the ammunition dumps had been blown up.

The causes of the Allied victory may be summed up as follows:

1. The great military qualities of General Franchet d'Espérey should be recognized; his able dispositions, based partly on the old plan of Voivod Michich, afterwards elaborated by General Guillaumat, consisted in the concentration in the Moglena sector of a mobile reserve for attack, created even at the cost of withdrawing troops from other areas and leaving them weakly defended. The Moglena sector had been chosen because, as it presented the greatest natural difficulties, the Bulgarians had taken less trouble over its artificial defences. In view of the great scarcity of Allied reserves, those that were available had to be transported from one area to the other according to necessity. This was done in the case of the 122nd French Division and the heavy artillery; as soon as a breach had been made they were transferred to the sector of the A.F.O., but as a matter of fact there was no need of the 122nd Division, because the A.F.O. was able to act on its own account; the division therefore went into army reserve.

2. The admirable dash and excellent discipline and staying power of all the Allied contingents over extremely difficult ground and under a semi-tropical sun, until the rainy season began, when the whole country became a muddy swamp. To the French troops, above all, was

due the breach in the enemy front on September 15th ; the British distinguished themselves for the magnificent tenacity in their attack on the terrible positions of the Lake Doiran area, an attack, which if it did not succeed, yet contributed very materially, according to the Bulgarians themselves, to the victory ; our own troops had the great merit first of having held on for two years on the theoretically untenable sector of Hill 1050, and afterwards of having developed the rapid pursuit of the enemy with an extremely arduous battle at the end, when the Bulgarians were outflanked at Sop, a battle, the continuation of which, was interrupted at the last moment by the Armistice. The Serbians played a valiant part in the attack at the centre, but the outstanding feature of their action was their magnificent and fantastic march towards the Fatherland, regardless of the impervious mountain ranges, extending one behind the other across the line of advance, almost without food, with few munitions and practically no equipment. Inspired by patriotic enthusiasm which was a religious faith, they drove the enemy from height to height, from valley to valley, without troubling to see if they were followed by their supplies, which, in fact, never came up with them. One saw old soldiers who had been detailed as hospital orderlies on the lines of communication, because they were regarded as unfit for active service, abandoning their posts, seizing rifles and haversacks filled with biscuit, hurry forward to join in the pursuit. In every village deserters from the Bulgarian Army, who were Serbs enrolled by force, were discovered, and now rejoined the Serbian Army. When the latter reached Serbia proper, these increases in strength were even more considerable, because there were many Serbian soldiers who had remained hidden in the mountains during the Bulgarian occupation of the country, and who, the moment they saw the liberating army of their brothers arrive, also joined in the pursuit of the enemy. It is said that in the Morava Division, which at the beginning of the offensive numbered only 3,500 rifles in all, one regiment alone, after a few weeks, had no less than 5,000.



CRASHED GERMAN AEROPLANE.



GENERAL FRANCHET D'ESPÉREY DECORATING GENERALS MILNE AND MOMBEILLI.





Nor must the Greeks be forgotten. With all the defects of their Army, many detachments fought valiantly, especially the Serres Division, which, fighting under the British, distinguished itself at the battle of Doiran and suffered severe losses. The French and Serbian cavalry, once the breach had been made, were in the vanguard of the pursuit, and pushed forward by forced marches which have few equals in the annals of the war.

3. The perfect co-operation between armies of different nationalities, a co-operation which Sarraill had never been able to achieve. This was one of General Franchet d'Espérey's main successes. There were, in fact, the Central Franco-Serbian Group, composed of 6 Serbian Divisions and 2 French; the I Group of Divisions, with 1 French, 2 Greek, and for a short time 1 British Division; the A.F.O., comprising 5 French, 1 Italian, and 1 Greek Division; the British Army with 3, and afterwards 4 British, 5 Greek Divisions, and one French Regiment. Nevertheless everything functioned regularly as if it had been a perfectly homogeneous force.

4. The faulty dispositions of the enemy. Although, as we have seen, the latter were stronger in effectives than the Allied forces, they had failed to create reserves. In Bulgaria there were only three regiments available, and the Germans had withdrawn all their battalions from the Balkan front, except three, to which a few others were added during the offensive. In Serbia and Roumania, the German and Austrian garrisons were numerous, but they were composed of units whence nearly all the younger soldiers had been withdrawn. The enemy thus had only small area reserves, and no army reserves. When the central sector was broken through the enemy Command tried to stem the advancing tide by concentrating regiments withdrawn from distant sectors, such, for instance, as the 14th, which was notorious for its mutinies; but it was then too late. Only in the Doiran sector, where some of the best regiments were collected, was it possible to hold up the British and Greeks for a few days, and also in the Cerna loop, where the German Command made its influence

more directly felt, and there the resistance was more vigorous.

5. The Bulgarian demoralization. The Bulgarians had for some time been fed up with the war. They believed that they had obtained definitely everything to which they aspired, and they did not see why they should continue to fight simply to please the Germans. They, like the Serbs, were drawn by an irresistible desire towards their homes, but the Serbs in order to do this had to fight, while the Bulgarians saw that the only way to achieve their object was to make peace. The Allied victories in France, although the Command tried to suppress all news of them, ended by becoming known to the masses and produced a depressing effect. The overbearing attitude of the Germans, who treated Bulgaria almost as a conquered country and not as an ally, and especially the requisitions of foodstuffs in Bulgaria to be sent to Germany, provoked serious discontent. Then there was the question of Dobrugia, which aroused much disaffection. The Bulgarians hoped that, after the defeat of Roumania, the whole of that province would have been ceded to them, instead of only the southern district, as was provided for in the treaty of alliance with Germany. The latter did not wish to hand over the whole province, because she intended to keep control over the Cernavoda-Constanza railway, and also because Turkey objected to that line being in the hands of the Bulgarians. Actually they were granted the southern district (the part ceded to Roumania by the peace of 1913), while the rest was administered by Turkey, an arrangement against which the Bulgarian Government, and finally even the Commander-in-Chief, General Gekoff, protested vigorously, putting the blame on the German General Staff. There was discontent also over the question of Adrianople. Signs of demoralization appeared in the numerous mutinies and the ever more frequent desertions. The fact of having forcibly applied conscription to the inhabitants of the occupied territories, although it helped to strengthen the Army with fresh effectives, weakened it in its moral unity, because the inhabitants of the

province of Nish were true Serbs and hated the Bulgarians, and those of Macedonia, if they had more sympathy for the Bulgarians than for the Serbs, did not wish to fight for either. The Allied Commands were fairly well informed of this state of feeling, and appreciated it at its proper value. The pro-German Radoslavoff Cabinet had resigned in June, and the Malinoff Cabinet, by which it had been succeeded, was disposed to seek to come to some agreement with the Entente.

6. Finally, there was the hope on the part of the Bulgarians, who now realized that German power was shaken, of obtaining favourable conditions from the Entente by means of a separate peace. If they could no longer dream of the creation of that big Bulgaria which had been promised to them by Germany, they hoped at least to preserve some part of their conquests, to keep the territories gained from Turkey, and perhaps to receive substantial financial assistance. The Entente had promised nothing of all this, but its semi-official propaganda gave the Bulgarians to understand that the sooner they surrendered the better would their treatment be.

The immediate consequences of the Bulgarian capitulation were of great importance. This was the first decisive blow struck at the Central Powers. Until September 15th the main line of the enemy resistance from the North Sea to the Swiss frontier, from the Stelvio to the mouth of the Piave, from the mouth of the Semeni to that of the Struma, was intact. In France the Germans had had to fall back before the Anglo-Franco-American attacks, but the famous Hindenburg line was not yet broken, and their Armies had been beaten, but not vanquished; on the Piave the Austrians had been seriously defeated in their June attack, but they had lost very little ground, and their Army was still in full efficiency. It was on the Macedonian front that the first fatal breach was made. The Central Powers not only had one ally the less, but they were threatened from behind, and had to consider the necessity of creating a new front on their eastern gateway, which until then had been defended



by the Bulgarians. Turkey, moreover, already staggering under the sledge-hammer blows delivered by General Allenby in Palestine and Syria, now no longer possessed any line of communication by land with Germany and Austria.

## CHAPTER XVI

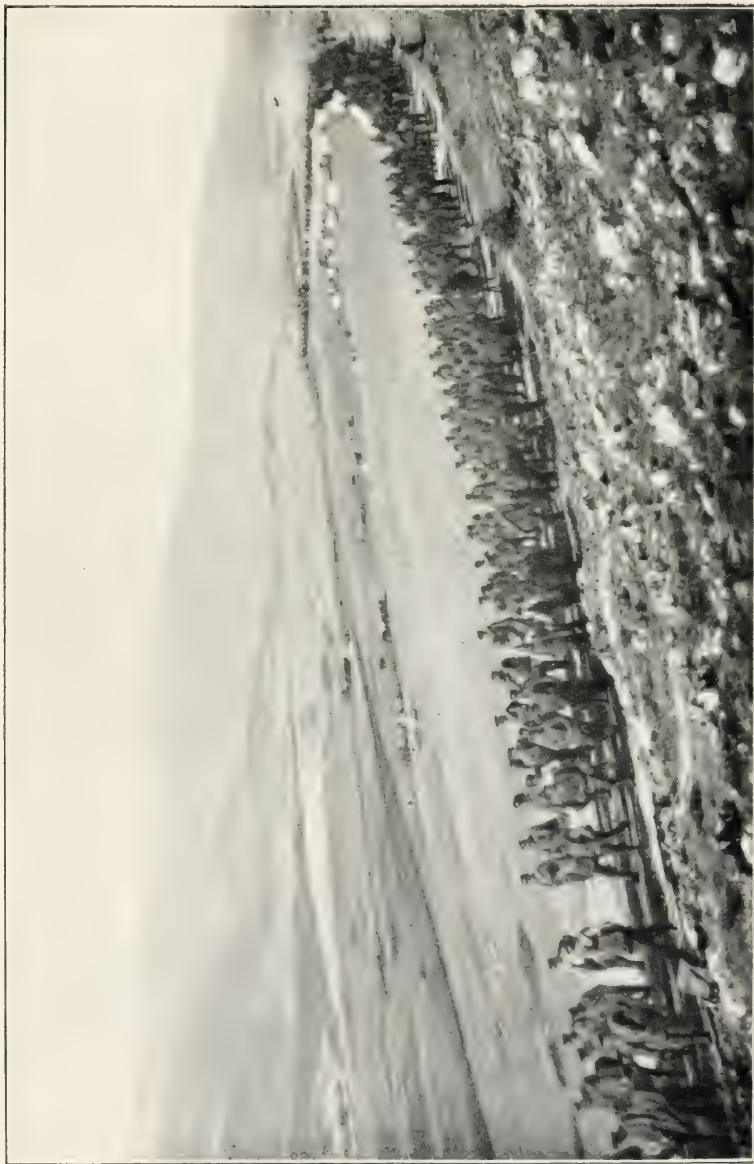
### FINAL OPERATIONS

THE armistice with Bulgaria marked the final collapse of German influence in that country. The Tzar Ferdinand abdicated and went into exile, and was succeeded by his son Boris. The capitulation created a profound impression in Germany. The Press published violent invectives against the "treacherous" ally, there was a panic on the stock exchange, and on September 30th the Imperial Chancellor, von Hertling, resigned, and was succeeded by Prince Max of Baden. Marshal von Hindenburg, in a letter addressed to the latter on October 5th, admitted that the collapse of the Macedonian front was one of the causes which excluded all hope—as far as man can judge, of forcing the enemy to make peace. Some German papers demanded that Bulgaria should be driven back into the fold by force. But the necessary force was now wanting. There was nothing for it but to reconstitute a new front in Serbia and Roumania, and this the Germans and Austrians tried to do.

The German units of the XI Army who had escaped capture, withdrew into Serbia to join the other German and Austrian forces already there or on their way from other sectors. Thus the 21st Infantry Regiment, elements of the 256th Reserve Regiment (the one which had appeared recently on the Struma front), of the 275th Regiment, which was in Macedonia, and of the 12th Landwehr concentrated in Serbia. From France the Alpen Corps arrived, which had only just come out of the line after much hard fighting, the 50th Landwehr from Minsk, and from South Russia the 217th and 219th Infantry Divisions, while Austria sent the 9th Division

withdrawn from Italy, and the 25th. But these troops did not all reach the new front at the same time, except those who were already in Serbia or who had retreated from Macedonia; the other reinforcements arrived *par petits paquets*. In Roumania there was a still more numerous Army—on paper—commanded by Marshal von Mackensen, consisting of 3 German divisions, strengthened by 7 Landwehr divisions from Russia. This force, echeloned along the Danube from the Iron Gates to Cernavoda and along the railway from Cernavoda to Constantza, was divided into two armies, one of which assumed the name of the XI German Army which had gone to pieces in Macedonia, and was commanded by General von Scholtz himself, and the other, called the Army of Occupation in Roumania, commanded by General Koch. These forces were, in appearance, by no means negligible, but were spread over too vast a front, and the difficulties of communications south of Belgrade rendered their concentration very slow. Many of the men, moreover, belonged to the older classes and were partially unfit.

Even for the Allies communications were now extremely difficult. As far as the line of the old front they were comparatively good. But beyond it the retreating enemy had destroyed the railways, and the roads were in an appalling condition. From Ghevgheli to Veles the line was destroyed in many places, but it was repaired fairly quickly, so that by October 15th trains were already running with one interruption. From Veles to Uskub the destruction had been almost complete, as was also the case north of Uskub. The Constantinople railway was interrupted at Demir Hissar, where the bridge, as we have seen, had been blown up by the French early in the war. The C.A.A. had therefore to limit the number of troops pushing north to an indispensable minimum. Nothing, however, could restrain the Serbs, irresistibly drawn forward by the longing to return to their homeland. For supplies they had to rely on lorries, and the British provided them with 300 Fords, carrying 500 kilograms each, for the roads over which heavier vehicles could not pass.



ALTER THE VICTORY. ENEMY PRISONERS.





The objectives of the Allies were now four: the liberation of Serbia, the occupation of Bulgaria, the liberation of Roumania, and the capture of Constantinople. The territory over which the *Armée d'Orient* was operating, already vast before the Bulgarian capitulation, had now become immense; it was, we may say, the whole of the Balkan Peninsula, except Albania, which was left to the Italian XVI Corps, and Eastern Thrace, still in Turkish hands. To the north its operations were intended to link up eventually with those of the Italian Army, and General Franchet d'Espérey said that he hoped soon to shake hands with General Diaz in Croatia.

The I Serbian Army, the Danube Division leading, undertook the first of these tasks, supported by the French and Serbian cavalry, while the II Army still remained for a little to mount guard on the Bulgarian western frontier. The left flank of the I Army in the Mitrovitzka area was covered by the Tranić Group, which, however, was relieved between the 5th and the 20th of October by the II Serbian Army and moved eastward. On the 7th the I Army was at Leskovatz in Old Serbia<sup>1</sup> and advancing on Nish, which the Austro-Germans had orders to hold at all costs, as it was the chief centre of the area, with immense depots and dumps, and the junction of the Belgrade-Salonica railway with the line towards Sofia and Constantinople; a local line also branches off to Zayetchar. A force consisting of troops of 3 German divisions (217th, 219th and Alpen Corps) and of 2 Austrian divisions (9th and 25th) tried to hold back the Serbs. But the latter on the 11th had occupied the heights dominating the town from the south, thus obliging the enemy to evacuate it after a brief engagement. The I Army continued its advance along the Morava valley, preceded by the cavalry, and did not trouble to await the two forces that were to support its flanks—the II Army on the left and the French divisions of the A.F.O. on the right, which had been delayed by the state of the roads—but was content with the support afforded

<sup>1</sup> I use the expression "Old Serbia" to designate the Serbian State as it was before the Balkan Wars, i.e. exclusive of Macedonia.

by the Serbian and French cavalry. The enemy offered some resistance at Bukovich, and then at Parachin, where the fighting was more obstinate (October 23rd–24th); but the Serbs, although inferior in numbers, inflicted a serious defeat on them. This obliged them to evacuate even their positions at Kraguyevatz to the west of the railway, with its important arsenal. This town was occupied by the Drina Division on the 26th, which the following day conquered Mounts Ovchar and Chablatz, dominating positions and the scene of Voivod Michich's great victory in the winter of 1914. On the 30th the I Army reached the Danube, and occupied the Biskuplje–Semendria line, while other detachments, after a sharp struggle, captured Mount Kosmaj and then Stoinik, 38 km. from Belgrade, whose outer defences are dominated from that point. On November 1st the Serbs re-entered their capital in triumph.

In the meanwhile the II Army was advancing through the Sanjak of Novibazar and Western Serbia, while the Tranić Group was pushing on towards Montenegro and Bosnia. On October 7th it had reached Ferizovich, on the 12th, after a sharp fight, Mitrovitza, and on the 15th, Ipek (Montenegro), where it captured 600 prisoners; 900 more fell into its hands on the 20th, after which it effected a conversion to the east, leaving the Yugoslav Division in charge of that area. The only French detachment remaining there was the 58th Battalion of Chasseurs à pied, while the 57th Division returned to Macedonia to be broken up.

The II Group of Divisions (General Patey), comprising the 17th Colonial and the 76th Divisions, to which the Tranić Group was now also attached, extended its occupation to Western Serbia and Eastern Bulgaria, which it entered by rail. On the 17th it was at Pirot, whence it pushed on an advanced force to Kniazhevatz, and on the 19th it reached Zayetchar. The 76th Division reached the Danube, and occupied the loop of the river between Vidin and Lom Palanka, thus interrupting the navigation on the Danube for the Central Empires. General Jouinot-Gambetta's cavalry group had already

reached the river, after a fantastic raid from Uskub. On the 27th it occupied Mount Antonov-Kladenatz, beyond Zayetchar, and then Dolnji Milanovatz near the Danube. On the 30th it was north-west of Negotin and in liaison with the Serbian cavalry, followed at a short distance by the 17th Colonial Division.

By November 1st the whole of Serbia was free of the enemy, except the north-west territory; but out of this, too, they were soon driven by the II Serbian Army, which then spread over into Bosnia and Montenegro. The remnants of the German and Austrian Divisions, exhausted and without supplies, recrossed the Danube and the Save. The whole of Bosnia arose in favour of the Yugoslav State, and also in Croatia and Slavonia there were demonstrations in the same sense. In the Banat, which the Serbs entered after crossing the Danube at Moldova and Basiatz, some final engagements occurred with the German troops, who were invariably defeated.

The demonstrations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Croatia-Slavonia, and in the Banat were in favour of a Yugoslav Federation. This was the idea that united the various peoples of Yugoslav race, of whose aspirations Serbia had made herself the standard-bearer. It would have been more difficult to raise similar enthusiasm for the purely pan-Serb idea, which the Government, and above all the Army, always had in mind, even though they did not proclaim it openly. To this fact are due, to a large extent, the conflicts which subsequently divided the different parts of the new kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

It should be borne in mind that the Serbian advance was enormously facilitated by the events on the Italian front. If Austria could only send weak and totally inadequate reinforcements to stem the Serbian advance, it was because her whole Army was nailed down on the Piave and on the Asiago Plateau by the menace of the coming Italian offensive, and afterwards overwhelmed in the irreparable disaster of Vittorio Veneto. The last vigorous resistance of the enemy in Serbia was at Parachin on October 23rd and 24th. On the 24th the Italian



offensive was launched. The latter also contributed very largely to the outbreak of the revolt of the Yugoslavs, who until that moment had been the most faithful subjects of His Imperial and Royal Apostolic Majesty.

There were still the other two tasks to be accomplished—Roumania and Constantinople. General Allenby had been rapidly conquering Northern Palestine and Syria,<sup>1</sup> and the moment seemed to have arrived to deliver the *coup-de-grâce* against Turkey by an attack on Constantinople. Britain attached great importance to the new expedition, which might be regarded as the long-expected retribution for the bloody but heroic check at the Dardanelles. General Sir George Milne was to command it. He brought back his G.H.Q. from Janesh to Salonica, and preparations were at once commenced in Eastern Macedonia, which had just been evacuated by the Bulgars. The expeditionary force, officially described as the "Oriental Section of the Allied Armies," was formed on October 6th, and comprised the 22nd, 26th and 28th British Divisions (the 26th was at Mustafa Pasha on the Turco-Bulgarian frontier, and the other two between Stavros and Dede-Agatch), the Italian Sicilia Brigade, which had been brought back to Salonica from the Monastir-Prilep area, and was commanded by General Garruccio, the 122nd French Division (General Topard), the I Greek Corps (General Ioannou), to which two more divisions of the National Defence Corps were to be added. The British divisions, greatly reduced in strength after the very heavy fighting at Lake Doiran, had been reinforced by some Indian battalions, which had arrived too late to take part in the offensive.

According to reliable information, the scanty forces detailed for the defence of Constantinople had been strengthened by four Caucasus divisions,<sup>2</sup> already arrived or *en route*, and by some others from Anatolia, while Germany was sending German troops by way of the Black Sea. But the Turkish units were greatly reduced

<sup>1</sup> The British first broke through the enemy lines on September 19th.

<sup>2</sup> The Caucasus divisions, created during the war for the campaign in that area, were numbered apart.

in strength by battle losses, sickness, and above all by desertions, and it was estimated that their total number of rifles was not more than 12,000 to 15,000. Towards the end of October it was known that the German troops were already leaving Thrace for Roumania, perhaps on their way to the Western front. The plan of operations of the new Allied expeditionary force was the following : The river Maritza was to be crossed by a surprise movement, and three bridge-heads were to be built on its banks, whence three columns would advance on Adrianople, Kuleli Burgas and Ipsala respectively. Immediately afterwards the bulk of General Milne's forces would cut the Turkish Army in two, separating those in the Gallipoli Peninsula from those in Thrace, and occupying the Lule Burgas-Muradli-Rosdosto line, while the Allied fleets would bombard the enemy batteries in the Gulf of Enos. Finally, the Isthmus of Bulair would be attacked, with the object of seizing the whole of the European shore of the Dardanelles. Then the artillery fire would be concentrated on the batteries on the Asiatic shore. Once the Dardanelles were conquered the fleets could penetrate into the Sea of Marmara, whence it would be easy to force Constantinople to capitulate.

In the meanwhile, General Allenby was advancing by leaps and bounds ; he had conquered the whole of Syria, and captured two Turkish armies, with many guns and immense booty. The expeditionary force in Mesopotamia was also pushing ahead rapidly. The Turkish Army was visibly dwindling away, and the deserters numbered several hundreds of thousands, so that it was obvious that Turkey was not in a position to resist the blow which General Milne was about to strike ; he had indeed already seized the bridgehead at Ipsala and was about to cross the Maritza at other points. On October 29th, General Townshend, who had been taken prisoner by the Turks at Kut-el-Amara in 1916, was set free, and sent to the inter-Allied Naval Command at Mudros, bearing a request for an armistice. The Turkish Cabinet, which emanated from the notorious Committee of Union and Progress, had fallen, and was succeeded by another,

constituted with the express object of concluding peace. Enver and Talaat, the two evil geniuses of Turkey, had fled with their most compromised satellites and large funds embezzled from the Government Treasury and from private persons. The Turkish proposals were considered, and as soon as the Turkish plenipotentiaries arrived, among whom was Raouff Bey, the Minister of Marine in the new Cabinet and a well-known Ententophil, negotiations were commenced between them and Admiral Calthorpe, Commander of the British Naval Forces in the *Ægean*, as representing the Allies. After a short discussion, the Armistice was concluded on October 30th, and came into force on the 31st. The order to advance from the Maritza was therefore suspended.

The Allied fleets, commanded by Admiral Calthorpe, passed through the Dardanelles on November 10th, and anchored in the Bosphorus off the Sultan's palace at Dolma Bagshe. It was the first time that a hostile fleet passed through the Straits and trained its guns on the Ottoman capital since the conquest in 1453. The previous day, General Sir Henry Wilson, Commander of the British XII Corps, had reached Constantinople, where he had been sent with a small Staff by General Franchet d'Espérey as his representative in Turkey. He was given command of all the Allied troops destined for the occupation of the city and of European Turkey (including the Asiatic shores of the Straits). These forces comprised the 28th British Division, the 122nd French and later an Italian regiment (the 61st) and a Greek battalion, besides some detachments of gendarmes. The points occupied were the city itself, Scutari, and various places on the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. Subsequently the occupation was extended to other areas.

A few weeks later Sir George Milne removed to Constantinople with his whole Staff, and on February 8, 1919, General Franchet d'Espérey also arrived with the C.A.A. The further vicissitudes of the Allied occupation of Turkey belong to another chapter of history.

Let us now return to the 35th Division. After the Armistice with Bulgaria began a veritable Odyssey for





GERMAN PRISONERS CAPTURED BY THE ITALIANS ON HILL 1050.



HILL 1050. HOURS OF REST.





the Italian troops, a constant marching and counter-marching along roads deep in mud, without shelter for the night, across wild mountains, under torrents of rain, and later amid snowstorms ; the soldiers, however, were cheered by the thought that they had won the war and that their homecoming was near. From Sop the division at once began to march in a north-easterly direction, as it appeared then that it was destined, as General Mombelli strongly desired, to take part in the operations in Serbia. On October 9th the headquarters were at Prilep, and a large part of the troops were encamped in the neighbourhood of that town. Squads of Bulgarian prisoners, guarded by Allied infantry and reinforced by Italian engineer companies, set to work to improve the impossible roads and to repair the Monastir-Prilep décauville. A few days later the whole force crossed the Babuna Pass, except the Sicilia Brigade, which, as we have seen, was to take part in the Constantinople expedition, and was sent to Monastir, and the newly-created Spezia Brigade, made up out of elements of the others, which remained at Prilep.

General Mombelli's wish that his troops should be sent to Serbia to co-operate with the Serbian Army was shared by the Prince Regent Alexander, who expressed himself very decidedly in that sense. Had the 35th Division been given that destination, and had been able to fight on Serbian soil by the side of Voivod Michich's soldiers, the relations between the two peoples, which at that time were very good, would have become ever friendlier. The Italian soldiers, had they been left to garrison Serbia, Slavonia and the Banat, would certainly have made themselves popular with the inhabitants, as occurred in Bulgaria, still technically an enemy country, and our relations with the Serbian State would have been very different from what they actually became. This was then desired on both sides.

But tendencies and forces hostile to an Italo-Serb understanding unfortunately prevailed. The destination of the 35th Division was altered by order of the C.A.A., and the bulk of its troops were sent towards Bulgaria.

Hence new and exhausting marches, with supplies never arriving up to time on account of the badness of the roads and the deficiencies of certain services of the C.A.A. on which they still had to depend. After various intermediate halts, the Command reached Kustendil on November 13th, with the troops echeloned between Guyeshevo and Sofia, and soon after removed to Sofia itself. The division now spread over a large part of Bulgaria—Kustendil, Sofia, Vidin, Lom Palanka, etc. For some time there was a battalion at Burgas, and one at Philippopolis, belonging to the Sicilia Brigade, most of which had now left Salonica. When the British garrisons left the Dobrugia they were relieved by Italian troops.

Although the French forces in Bulgaria were now very few, the Inter-Allied Command in that country was entrusted to the French General Chrétien. His position was certainly anomalous, as hitherto the principle had been always applied that the Command in any given area should be entrusted to a general of the nation which had most troops in it. But the tact, character and excellent military qualities of General Chrétien rendered this illogical situation tolerable.

With the break-up of Austria-Hungary thousands of Italian prisoners were set free or freed themselves. While the bulk of them made for Italy, many tens of thousands who were in Hungary, Roumania, Galicia and Russia proceeded towards Salonica, as they knew that there were Italian troops in Macedonia. They had been cast adrift without food, with insufficient clothing, often in rags and unshod, when they set forth on their wretched pilgrimage towards their victorious comrades across the icy-cold, wind-swept tracks of the Balkans. The country was almost denuded of resources and, owing to the execrable state of the communications, it was impossible to send up supplies from Salonica, where they abounded. General Mombelli made superhuman efforts to bring relief to these unfortunate wanderers; he sent detachments of troops to Serbia, and with immense difficulty organized a service of supply and transport. Gradually



MONUMENT TO THE FALLEN OF THE 161ST ITALIAN REGIMENT ON VRATA HILL.





the liberated prisoners were conducted to Salonica, Burgas, or Constantza, and thence embarked for Italy. But large numbers perished from cold and hardships at the very moment when all were rejoicing over the glorious victory.

On November 4th the Villa Giusti Armistice between General Diaz, representing the Allies, and the Austro-Hungarian Command, was signed. But it was not clear whether and to what extent it was applicable to Hungary. On November 3rd two Magyar Field Officers presented themselves at the outposts of the Armée d'Orient in the Banat, stating that Hungary wished to conclude an armistice on her own account. In Hungary there was indeed no longer any recognized central authority, and the country was rushing headlong towards anarchy. Count Karolyi, the head of the Government, but almost without any authority, wished to enter into negotiations with General Franchet d'Espérey, who, however, had no instructions for dealing with such a situation. On the 7th a meeting between them took place; Count Karolyi declared that he had no army which he could rely on to hold the troops of Marshals von Mackensen and von Koevess in check, and asked for certain political concessions, which General Franchet d'Espérey was unable to grant. The latter added that he would proceed with the offensive as long as Hungary did not ratify the Villa Giusti Armistice, and, in conformity with instructions received from Paris, he threatened to send British and French divisions to Budapest. Karolyi then agreed immediately to his request, and on the 13th an armistice was signed between General Henrys (General Franchet d'Espérey had returned to Macedonia) and Voivod Michich for the Allies and M. Bela Linder for Hungary. According to the terms of this agreement, the Hungarian troops were to withdraw behind a line passing by Fünfkirchen, Baja, Mariatheresienstadt, the course of the Maros and the upper valley of the Great Szamos. Otherwise the terms of the Villa Giusti Armistice were reproduced as far as they were applicable to Hungary, save that the latter was authorized to keep six divisions on a war footing for the maintenance of

order, which was threatened by criminal Bolshevism. The further vicissitudes of Hungary were to cause the Allies more trouble yet.

There still remained the army of Marshal von Mackensen in Roumania to be dealt with. On October 19th, French troops reached the Danube. A few days previously General Berthelot had arrived at Salonica, with instructions to create a new "Army of the Danube" out of units of the *Armée d'Orient* to conduct operations in Roumania. This new organization, which appeared cumbersome and practically useless, comprised two French divisions, parts of two others, a cavalry regiment, a British division and the Garrison Brigade. All these forces were echeloned along the Danube within the month of October, three bridge-heads were built near Rustchuk, at Giurgiu, and between Shistov and Nicopolis, and on November 10th the troops began to cross the river. Roumania, after a heroic resistance, had been obliged, in consequence of the treachery of the Russian Bolsheviks acting on behalf of Germany, to sign the disastrous Peace of Bucarest, but now that the liberators were at the gates she was able to shake off the hated yoke; the Government ordered a fresh mobilization, and declared war against the Central Empires. This gave her afterwards the right to take part in the Peace Conference, in Paris, among the Allies. The day that the French troops crossed the Danube the Roumanian Army reappeared on the scene.

Marshal von Mackensen's troops offered but slight resistance. They soon gave up all hope of holding the Danube line, and thought only of retiring through Hungary into Austria and Germany. But it was an army in dissolution, almost without discipline, and its passage through Hungary might have led to serious trouble. On the other hand, if it were forced to surrender, there were no means of feeding it in the Balkans, nor ships to convey it home by sea. In the meanwhile the Serbian troops, in order to cut the communications between Roumania and Germany, occupied Vershetz and Neusatz, and pushed on towards Temesvar. The Armistice with

Germany having been concluded on November 11th, von Mackensen's army would have had only eight days in which to make use of the Hungarian railways, which, moreover, were in such bad condition as to be of little help ; but it was granted an extension of the time limit, as it was generally felt that, on the whole, the wisest course was to allow it to go home. Difficulties, however, arose with the Hungarian Government. Von Mackensen had been interned in the Castle of Pott, near Budapest, but it was feared that his Hungarian guards might leave him free to range through Hungary and perhaps promote disorders and insurrections. Consequently, to avoid trouble, a couple of squadrons of Morocco Spahis were sent to Pott, and on January 5, 1919 they escorted the Field Marshal to the Castle of Futtek near Neusatz, in an area occupied by troops of the Armée d'Orient, and later to Salonica. In that city which he had expected to enter one day in triumph, acclaimed by the inhabitants—who would not have failed to become pro-German for the occasion—he remained interned for some months.

The Armée d'Orient was now scattered over an immense territory. The Commander-in-Chief, still General Franchet d'Espérey, remained at Constantinople with his Staff. The city and the adjoining area was garrisoned by General Wilson's inter-Allied Force. At Salonica there remained fragments of the various Allied armies, commanded by General Génin, with detachments in other parts of Macedonia, especially in the old fighting zone, to collect the vast quantities of war material and to guard the prisoners. The latter were regarded as public nuisances, difficult to feed, and of little use for labour as there was very little work for them to do, so that the various Commands who had fought so hard to capture them were only too delighted when some of them escaped. The old Italian headquarters at Tepavei was occupied by the Bulgarian generals and field officers captured by our troops.

The bulk of the Italian Expeditionary Force was now in Bulgaria. The Dobrugia was occupied by Franco-British, and afterwards by Italian, detachments. In



Roumania, besides some Roumanian divisions, there was part of General Berthelot's army; the rest of it was for a short time in South Russia, together with some Greek and White Russian units, commanded by General d'Anselme.

The remnants of the A.F.O. and the Serbian Army were scattered about the new provinces occupied by Serbia, which were destined to form the new S.H.S. State, principally in the Banat and in Croatia-Slavonia. Small French detachments were in Montenegro, Cattaro, Ragusa, etc. In many of these places there were also Italian troops, and at Fiume there was a mixed Italian-French-British garrison. At Scutari the pre-war inter-Allied occupation was reconstituted, and a garrison consisting of a French, an Italian and a British battalion, commanded by General Foulon, was sent there.

All these troops took orders from General Franchet d'Espérey in Constantinople. The Italian troops in Bulgaria, in European Turkey and in Macedonia, belonging to the 35th Division, formed part of the *Armée d'Orient*. But the Italian detachments at Scutari and along the mid-Adriatic coast took orders from the Albanian Command, while those at Fiume were under the Italian III Army. Neither the former nor the latter had anything to do with the C.A.A. at Constantinople, whereas the French detachments in the same places were under it. The British Army, still commanded by General Milne, was under the C.A.A., but to a very limited extent, while the British troops in Asia Minor, in the Caucasus, etc., were also under General Milne, who, as far as they were concerned, had nothing whatever to do with the C.A.A. The Serbian Army was now acting entirely on its own.

All this Chinese puzzle of Commands seemed to have been invented for the express purpose of promoting inter-Allied disagreements—and it certainly succeeded in doing so. But the subsequent political and military vicissitudes of the Allied troops in the East do not belong to the history of the Balkan Campaign, but to that of the Peace Conference.

The Italian troops remained in Bulgaria until July

1919, when the 35th Division was broken up and its various elements repatriated, except the Regimental Command and one battalion of the 61st Regiment, which remained in Constantinople. During this period General Mombelli and his officers and men had occasion to show how high was the level of Italian civilization. No operation is more thankless nor more likely to become odious than the occupation of a vanquished country. But the Italian Expeditionary Force, which had borne itself so well during the war, also proved, in the eyes of the Bulgarians, whom it had so valiantly contributed to defeat, generous and dignified during the Armistice period. No unpleasant incident marred the relations between the troops and the inhabitants, but at the same time our men showed a proper reserve in their dealings with a nation with whom we were still technically at war. Further, the Italian soldiers did many acts of kindness and courtesy towards the natives that left indelible traces for the future good relations between the two peoples. We were fortunately spared the odium of garrisoning the country at the time when the *dura lex sed lex* of the Treaty of Neuilly had to be applied. On their departure the Italian troops were bidden farewell with numerous demonstrations of sympathy, which those who had some interest in presenting Italy in an unfavourable light tried to misrepresent as signs of deep and dark intrigues on her part, but which were in reality nothing more than manifestations of gratitude.

Here we shall end our brief chronicle of the Balkan Campaign. Let us hope that the remembrance of the common effort for the common cause, and of the great victory by which it was crowned, prove an earnest for the future brotherhood of the peoples who fought together, in the hard struggles for the peace of the world.



## APPENDIX A

### LETTER FROM VOIVOD MICHICH TO GENERAL PETITTI DI RORETO CONCERNING THE FIGHT- ING ON HILL 1050 IN FEBRUARY 1917

"THE magnificent exploit of your gallant troops, who, in spite of the desperate resistance of the enemy and their infernal fire, in spite of the enormous difficulties of the ground, yesterday, with irresistible dash, captured Hill 1050 by assault, has filled me with admiration; the two columns of your heroic 162nd Infantry Regiment have covered themselves with glory, inscribing a new and splendid page in the annals of the Italian Army, which are already so glorious. Under your high leadership your officers and men have given brilliant proof of their great valour.

"I congratulate you with all my heart, my dear General, and I beg you to inform them all of the deep homage of my admiration and of that of my whole army. I am really heart-broken, my dear General and dear comrade-in-arms, that a terrible accident, impossible to foresee and to prevent, should have obliged you to evacuate the positions captured so gallantly and at such cost. I deeply regret with you the death of all the dear and gallant comrades-in-arms who have so heroically fallen on the soil of my Fatherland, and I bow my head with the most profound respect before their sublime self-sacrifice, before their proud contempt of death in the struggle for the Great Common Cause. If you have had to abandon temporarily the positions occupied, it is a material loss easy to make good with troops such as yours. The great moral result so brilliantly obtained yesterday by your intrepid troops remains intact.

"Happy and proud to fight by your side, I beg you, my dear General, to accept the assurances of my high consideration and of my best sentiments.

(Signed) "MICHICH,"



## APPENDIX B

### LOSSES OF THE BELLIGERENTS DURING THE MACEDONIAN CAMPAIGN

	Killed	Wounded	Prisoners	Missing
French <sup>1</sup> . . . . .	20,000	—	—	—
British . . . . .	9,800	16,914	—	2,642
Italians . . . . .	2,841	5,353	—	—
Serbs <sup>2</sup> . . . . .	45,000	133,000	70,423	82,535
Greeks . . . . .	5,000	21,000	—	1,000
Bulgarians . . .	63,000 <sup>3</sup>	152,390	10,623 <sup>4</sup>	13,729

<sup>1</sup> Including men who died of disease and missing; no more detailed figures for the French Army are available.

<sup>2</sup> Including losses in operations before the Macedonian campaign.

<sup>3</sup> Including 888 accidentally killed and 13,198 died of wounds.

<sup>4</sup> Not including the large number of prisoners captured during the final retreat in September 1918.

## APPENDIX C

### GENERAL FRANCHET D'ESPÉREY'S TELEGRAM TO THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT CONCERNING THE ARMISTICE NEGOTIATIONS WITH BULGARIA

THIS evening a Bulgarian Field Officer presented himself with a flag of truce, asking in the name of General Todoroff, who describes himself as Commander-in-Chief of the Bulgarian Army, for a suspension of hostility for 48 hours to allow for the arrival of two delegates authorized by the Bulgarian Government, the Finance Minister Liapcheff and General Lukoff, Commander of the II Army, who are coming, with the consent of the Tzar Ferdinand, to arrange the conditions for an armistice and eventually for peace.

As this request may be merely a stratagem to permit a re-grouping of forces or the arrival of reinforcements, I have replied as follows :

“ The General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Allied Armies in the Orient, to H.E. the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Bulgarian Army.

“ I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of the letter which you have forwarded to me through the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, British Army in the Orient. My reply, which I am delivering to the Bulgarian Field Officer bearer of the letter in question, can, in view of the military situation, be only as follows.

“ I cannot grant any armistice or suspension of hostilities interrupting the operations now in course of execution. I shall, however, receive with all suitable courtesy, the properly accredited delegates of the Royal Bulgarian Government to whom Your Excellency alludes in your letter. These gentlemen should present themselves before the British lines, accompanied by an officer bearing a flag of truce.”

## APPENDIX D

### ARMISTICE BETWEEN THE ALLIES AND BULGARIA, SIGNED AT SALONICA ON SEPTEMBER 29, 1918

Military Convention regulating the conditions for the suspension of hostilities between the Allied Powers and Bulgaria.

1. Immediate evacuation, in accordance with an agreement to be concluded, of the territories still occupied (by the Bulgarians) in Greece and Serbia. No cattle, wheat or foodstuffs of any kind shall be removed from these territories. No damage shall be inflicted while evacuating them. The Bulgarian administration shall continue to function in the parts of Bulgaria at present occupied by the Allies.

2. Immediate demobilization of the whole Bulgarian Army, except for a group of all arms, to be kept on a war footing, comprising :

3 divisions of 16 battalions each,  
5 regiments of cavalry.

Two divisions to be employed for the defence of the Eastern frontier and the Dobrugia, and one for guarding the railways.

3. The arms, munitions, military vehicles belonging to the demobilized units to be deposited at points which will be designated by the High Command of the Armies in the Orient ; they will be put into store by the Bulgarian authorities under Allied control. The horses will also be handed over to the Allies.

4. The material of IV Greek Army Corps, taken from the Greek Army when Eastern Macedonia was occupied, to be handed over to Greece, except such part of it as may have been sent to Germany.

5. Bulgarian troops who at present are to the west of the Uskub meridian and belonging to the XI German Army shall lay down their arms and be considered prisoners of war until further notice ; the officers will retain their arms.

6. The Allied Armies will employ Bulgarian prisoners in the Orient until peace is signed, without reciprocity as regards Allied prisoners of war. The latter shall be handed over to the Allies without delay, and interned civilians shall be absolutely free to return to their homes.

7. Germany and Austria-Hungary will be granted a delay of four weeks in which to withdraw their troops and military organization, from Bulgaria. During the same period the diplomatic and consular representatives of the Central Powers and their nationals shall leave Bulgaria.

*(Signed)*

FRANCHET D'ESPÉREY  
ANDRE LIAPCHEFF.  
GENERAL LUKOFF.





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